

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Karma Yoga Book 5

EXPRESSIONS OF THE MIND

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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*From the teachings of
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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



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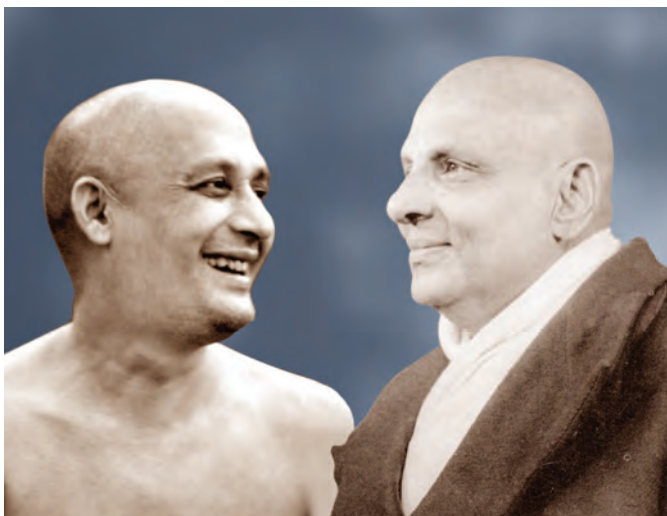
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh and Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of self-

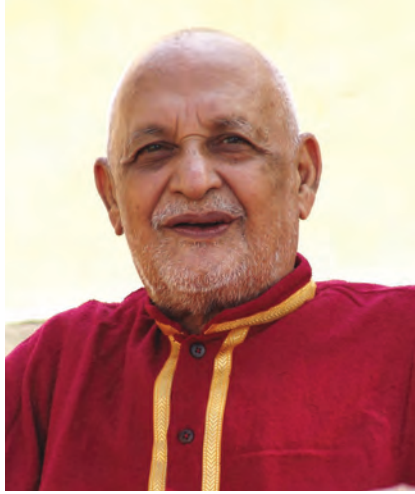


realized preceptors which ensures that the teachings remain fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

Following retirement from his role at the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda established Sannyasa Peeth for the development and training of sannyasins, and for his own pursuit of the higher sadhanas of sannyasa.

As the spiritual successor to Swami Satyananda, Swami Niranjanananda continues to inspire aspirants around the world.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

One should remain in the world like a lotus, which lives in water yet blossoms above it.

—Swami Satyananda

Karma yoga may appear to be based around external activity, but this is a misconception. The sadhana of karma yoga occurs within the mind. External activity and interactions are the medium for the process of karma yoga, but they are not karma yoga. For a practitioner of karma yoga, the whole world becomes a field for sadhana, and all actions are performed for the sake of the yogic goal, not for their own sake. The yogic goal is to attain a pure state, beyond the conditioned self. Knowing this, the karma yogi sees each and every occasion, great or small, as an opportunity for mental purification.

Swami Sivananda makes this clear when he says, “Karma yoga is the effective sadhana for chitta shuddhi. The performance of actions without an eye on their fruits brings about purification of the mind.” *Karma Yoga Book 5: Expressions of the Mind*, thoroughly explores this aspect of karma yoga, providing a detailed understanding of the relevant themes, from the points of view of three generations of masters who have trod the path, both personally and as guides of countless disciples.

The idea of purifying the mind, of developing immunity from reactions and the impact of situations, of living without

identifying with one's thoughts and actions, of moving beyond the limitations of ego and being able to experience each moment as meditation, implies a deep faith in the capacity for human evolverment which is simply absent in most cultural paradigms. The existence of a refined system for accomplishing these high aims reflects the perfected psychology of the yogic tradition, and the unparalleled brilliance of its preceptors. *Expressions of the Mind* is compiled from material of a calibre arising from both the perfection of the system and the brilliance of the masters.

Renounce the doership

The average person experiences life from a self-centred perspective in which they identify unquestioningly with their body, mind and emotions. Functioning from this point of view, each individual is driven by conditioned perceptions and impressions of which they are largely unaware. In this state, a person's attachment to their thoughts, actions and feelings limits creativity by binding them to unconscious patterns of mind and behaviour. They believe that they are the doer, and consequently put pressure on themselves to achieve, to acquire, to enjoy, and to succeed, as this seems to be the path to happiness. However, this type of relationship with life means that when there is misfortune or failure, it is felt in a most personal way, and a cloud of suffering takes over. This way of being is ruled by the dualities, and one swings between likes and dislikes, pleasure and pain, ambition and disappointment, fulfilment and frustration.

Karma yoga advocates the opposite approach. It optimistically declares that by letting go of the idea of being the doer and the enjoyer, one also lets go of expectations, ambitions, and the limitations and disappointments that arise from them. Freed from doership, one can become an instrument, or channel, through which intuition, or divine will flows. At this level, life becomes purely creative, as the mind opens and expands beyond its conditioned nature, allowing perception to become objective. Swami Satyananda

clearly connects this attitude with karma yoga, saying, “One should not identify the ego with the situations, one should think, ‘I am only an instrument, an agent; I am not the doer.’ This is the spirit of karma yoga.”

Egodectomy

Facing the ego is an inevitable part of practising karma yoga. In the beginning, people don’t really know what their ego is, or how it colours all that they think, feel and do. When yoga is adopted as a method for maturing and evolving the personality, awareness of the ego principle, or sense of ‘I-ness’, gradually develops. Recognition of the role of ego in one’s reactions, feelings and obsessions, is part of the process of karma yoga. Without this, there is no karma yoga. The ego is the greatest obstacle to spiritual progress, as its power is usually disguised in the form of strong emotions or thinking patterns that dominate the psyche. Its ways are tricky and an expert in ego management is needed. The guru is that expert, and those who place themselves in the hands of a guru must be prepared for egodectomy.

Swami Niranjanananda aptly describes the ultimate need for a guru in dealing with the ego: “The yogis say that the final hurdle to cross in the process of self-realization is the ego. One doesn’t need a guru to learn practices, but a guru becomes necessary to help overcome this last obstacle, the ego. The guru channels the ego and changes its direction. This process is called egodectomy.” Paradoxically, with the reduction and channelling of ego, one does not lose one’s self or become ineffective and unmotivated. To the contrary, such a person gains on all levels, as they have overcome the limitations of the small self, and merged with universal consciousness.

Peace

As progress is made on the path of karma yoga, peace of mind grows. Immunity to the dualities of life develops. The influence of the ups and downs, successes and failures,

satisfactions and disappointments, reduces in intensity. The mind experiences a quiet, clear state: this is the attainment of purity. An effortless quality pervades such a person's actions and interactions, as their energy is used with perfect efficiency and effectiveness, and they are able to flow with circumstances, always adapting to the moment. Such a person is unfettered by inner struggle or conflict – the mind, emotions, energy and ego are managed, and as a result the barriers to higher states of knowing dissolve. During this stage of evolution, meditation in action becomes a reality.

When meditation in action is realized, there is an expanded awareness in which one is conscious of the full range of internal and external happenings simultaneously. With this expansion of mind, one's ability and capacity expand and a superior intelligence awakens, enabling excellence in all pursuits. Having rid the mind of the shackles of negativity and stagnation, its energy is free to connect with the spiritual nature. Instead of being controlled by karma, one becomes the controller of karma and destiny. Remarkably, the entire process of karma yoga which can bring one to this sublime point is based on simply superimposing the attitude of witnessing onto one's daily duties, responsibilities and relationships. Such is the sophisticated psychology of karma yoga that it can take the sincere aspirant from the tamasic grip of the conditioned mind, to freedom of expression through sattwic action.

1

Karma Yoga and the Mind

MIND AND PURITY

How does karma yoga purify the mind?

Swami Satyananda: The practice of karma yoga purifies the mind. Through karma yoga, one works out one's karma, desires, motives, cravings and passions, everything that is within. A person comes in touch with many things in the world, and he expresses his deep-rooted emotions, conflicts, inhibitions, anxieties and worries. Insecurities, fears, love, hatred and passions do not come from outside, they exist within. When a person involves himself in karma yoga, he has an opportunity to explode these karmas and, in that way, purify the mind.

What is the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Mahat* means the 'great mind' or the 'higher mind'. It is also called *antahkarana*, which means 'inner or subtle instrument'. This higher mind has four functions: *ahamkara*, ego, the 'I' identity; *chitta*, impressions, memories and samskaras; *buddhi*, intelligence; and *manas*, the finite sequential mind. These four functions help one to evolve, progress and grow in life and, in fact, experience life. In yoga, using the word 'mind' is like using the word 'body'. When the word body is used, it refers not to any particular part, organ or system of the body, but to the total body

comprised of many different systems, organs and functions. These various components are identified by the word 'body'. In the same manner, the word 'mind' refers to the total mind, which consists of four identifiable functions.

Ahamkara: The first function or product of mahat is the ego, ahamkara. This ego or self-identity is an awareness of 'me' existing as an independent unit, an independent person. Ahamkara is the realization that 'I exist'. An individual exists, he identifies with himself because he exists. He identifies with the body for he exists in the body. He identifies with the mind for he can experience the mind. The knowledge that 'I live', 'I exist', 'I am', 'This is my body', 'This is my mind', 'This is my life' is ahamkara, self-identity or self-awareness. *Aham* means 'I', *akara* means form, 'the form of I'. What is the form of 'I'? It is the individual self in totality.

Chitta: The second function of mahat is chitta, the dimension where karmas and samskaras are stored in the deep unconscious. Chitta is also the centre for memory; memories that are ingrained in the mind in the form of impressions, images and experiences. The mind accumulates these memories and samskaras over a period of time. They relate not only to this life but also to the past, and are sown in the subconscious and unconscious states. A samskara that is being expressed today reflects what was gained in the past and is being lived in the present. The samskaras that are being cultivated today will be lived in the future. Right now a person is cultivating samskaras; they are not part and parcel of his nature as yet. The samskaras that he creates in the present will influence his future and the samskaras that he has created in the past are influencing his present. This is the role of chitta.

Buddhi: The third function of mahat is buddhi, rationality and logic. Due to the connection of the mind with the world of sense objects through the sensory media, it is in buddhi that *vasanas*, desires, are born. It is through buddhi that a person decides upon expectations. Buddhi connects one with the world. Buddhi connects the mind with sense

objects and sense pleasures. If there were no buddhi, no intelligence, there would be no recognition or interaction of the individual with sense objects. There would be no indication that an association with a given object or sensory experience will provide happiness or pain. Buddhi is the active factor of the mind, connecting the individual with the world, the environment and sense objects. It is buddhi which gives cognition and recognition of different objects that exist, so one is able to look at them, analyze them, reflect on them, rationalize them and take an appropriate decision.

Manas: The fourth function of mahat is manas. It is also translated as mind due to which there is often confusion about which mind one is talking about, the lower mind or the higher mind. Manas is not mind, its function is *sankalpa* and *vikalpa*, clarity and confusion, focus and distraction. The total cosmos is Brahman, containing the possibilities of multiverses, not just the known universe.

From Brahman emerges *prakriti*, the manifest nature, and from prakriti comes mahat. In the progression of mahat, the subtlest function is ahamkara, followed by chitta and buddhi, and the grossest is manas. Life is lived in the dimension of manas much of the time, with some association with buddhi, some association with chitta and some connection with ahamkara. The field of performance, action and living is predominantly the dimension of manas. Buddhi and chitta are secondary and ahamkara is the underlying principle.

How is the mind educated?

Swami Satyananda: It must be remembered that the beginning of yoga is not meditation, but training this undisciplined, uneducated, powerful mind, which flows like a river in full spate. This mind cannot be controlled at different points; it has to be educated. Education is most important and the mind receives it through karma. This means that everything one does, right or wrong, is karma, and that karma can be transmuted into karma yoga provided there is enlightenment in the individual.

What is the true purpose of action?

Swami Satyananda: Work has different purposes. A person may work to maintain his family, to earn more money to enjoy life or to become immensely rich. He may work because he likes working; it gives him peace of mind, and by working, the day is spent quickly. He may also work in order to purify his mind and karma. One should have a purpose for the work one is doing. Therefore, one has to discover the purpose of karma. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, there is only one purpose of karma: purification of the whole area of the mind. Sri Krishna says (5:11) that yogis who have abandoned attachment perform actions only for purification of the self.

*Kaayena manasaa buddhyaa kevalairindriyairapi;
Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatmashuddhaye.*

Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform action only by the body, mind, intellect and even by the senses, for purification of the self.

Just as it is necessary to clean the garbage from the room or repair the broken parts of the house, in the same way, it is necessary to know how to do karma, not only for yoga or nirvana, but for enriched happiness. *Chitta shuddhi*, purification of the mind, should be the purpose of the actions. One marries, has children, works and earns money; it is a process of fixing one's karma. It is a process for fixing the passions, insecurities and greed. The various stages one is undergoing in life are nothing but a way to work out and do away with one's karma. The yoga of selfless action, karma yoga, is not just a charitable act, it is important for purification of the mind.

Karma yoga is action done with complete awareness by which the mind and consciousness are purified. Many people think they are only working to keep the ashram or institution functioning, but this is not a clear picture of karma yoga. The institution may benefit, but this is certainly not the aim.

The real purpose of karma yoga is to provide a means of self-purification.

How is the mind related to karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The mind is of two types, the lower mind and the higher mind. They could also be called the involved mind and the discriminative mind, the gross mind and the transcendental mind, the *apara* mind and the *para* mind. One is the expansive, transcendental awareness which contains everything. In the other, the gross aspects of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are experienced. At the lower level of mental behaviour, the mind is only waiting for personal gratification. This applies to all four aspects of the mind.

The gross buddhi or intellect connects one with the world, desires and needs, and the higher intellect allows one to have a broader perspective of life. When the intellect is only limited to 'me', it takes on a selfish quality, but in higher intelligence the selfish qualities, self-oriented desires and needs are transcended. The intellect that is used in daily life to study, work and live is the lower form of intelligence. When one frees oneself from the results of this intelligence, from the notions of joy and sorrow, desire and desirelessness, right and wrong, and reaches beyond this gross intelligence, one experiences the higher intelligence, which is an expansive knowledge. There is awareness of everything, one knows and understands the working, basis and purpose of everything, every karma.

While the intellect is in the lower realm, it goes on traversing the fields of *pramana*, proof, *viparyaya*, misconception, and *vikalpa*, unfounded belief. This intellect is always looking for proof, making assumptions or manifesting false knowledge in the mind. False knowledge is exemplified by the three people who each see a chameleon at different times in different locations and describe its colour as yellow, red or black according to what they see. However, a person who understands the nature of a chameleon knows

that it has the ability to change its colour in response to changes in the environment.

The intellect that one uses in the world, in sense experiences, is *apara buddhi*, lower intelligence. Therefore, even though one has intelligence, the thoughts and karmas are not appropriate. There is knowledge, but there is narrowness in the knowledge, which causes narrowness in the karmas and does not allow for spontaneity. People who have *para buddhi* or higher intelligence are not narrow in knowledge or action. They adopt an expansive outlook and use the intellect in the proper way. They do not become attached to sense objects as they know their nature, whereas a person who exists at the level of *apara buddhi* is attracted to sense objects and does not know their nature.

The word *buddhi* represents intellect, but intellect is also indicated by the words *mudha* and *viveka*. *Mudha* means dull, inert, stupid. A person can be intellectual and stupid at the same time when there is no understanding, awareness or realization. *Viveka* is where knowledge becomes a discriminative power. In the first case a person is ignorant of what he knows as he has had no experience or realization. This dullness and *viveka*, the discriminative ability, are expressions of the intellect.

The higher expression of the intellect is seen when one begins to modify the behaviour of the mind to experience and attain harmony and optimism. If the awareness is self-centred and self-oriented, wisdom only remains inert knowledge, which one is never able to apply in life. One knows what is right and what is wrong, but how many times has the wrong path been taken, knowing fully well that it was incorrect? Where was the judgement at that time, where was the discrimination and understanding? At that time 'me and my need' overpowered all understanding and knowledge.

The third component of the mind is *chitta*, which means experience of the internal consciousness. This internal consciousness can be experienced through memory, *smriti*.

A person can relive something that happened twenty years ago. That experience comes from chitta, the storehouse. The experiences and memories from the time the person was born till now are stored in chitta, and he can take them out whenever he likes. He can bring the memory of his wedding day or the birth of his child to the conscious level of the mind and relive the experience of that moment. The joys and sorrows are pasted on this memory board. The wise say that the impressions and karmas of the past lives are also contained in chitta. Sometimes when an aspirant is sitting in meditation and experiencing immense peace, suddenly a feeling or thought will appear which he was not aware of. Suddenly he remembers a long forgotten childhood memory.

A sannyasin was cured of his asthma when, in meditation, he suddenly remembered an incident from the time he was five years old and his nanny had force-fed him. When such events happen, people say it is a miracle, it is guru's grace, he was cured without medicine! But this mystery can be understood by realizing that he was able to cross layer after layer of the mind and dive deep into his chitta so that the suppressed memories came up, and once that impression was taken out of the mind, the inner imbalance went away. Memories exist at the conscious, subconscious and unconscious levels. If memories exist in the unconscious, they manifest as karmas and if they appear in the conscious, they manifest as knowledge.

The fourth element of the mind is ahamkara, ego. It is the strongest experience of human life. A rock is not as hard as the ego. If a hammer falls on a rock, the rock will shatter, but it is not so with the ego. The ego expresses itself in many ways. The first is the feeling in the mind that 'I am important'. When this feeling exists, the ego will surface. If a person is handed a broom and asked to clean, he will think, "I am being given a broom!" He may not say it aloud, but the thought will appear due to the ego. This thought does not appear due to manas, buddhi or chitta. If the person takes shelter in buddhi, he can accept the broom. He knows that

it is meant for a practical purpose and he does not revolt against it. However, when the ego, not buddhi, holds the broom, a negative tendency emerges.

Everyone is in the grasp of their ego. If a person enters the room and no one looks at him, his ego is hurt. If another person is not offered a chair to sit on, his ego is hurt. The ego never wants to lose its identity. Even if one becomes wise, the ego remains.

Vishwamitra was a renowned sage, but due to his competitive nature, his ego did not finish. He compared himself with Rishi Vasishtha continually, saying, "What qualities does he have that I don't? Why do people call him a brahmarishi and me only a rajarishi?" This comparative outlook is the basis of the ego. There is always comparison with what another person received, and that is a manifestation of ego. Vishwamitra was the *drashta* or seer of the Gayatri mantra, but even though he had darshan, his ego did not finish. Even when a devotee has darshan of God, his ego is not finished. He says, "God, please end the lack in my life." Why? For ego fulfilment. The main cause of all comparative and selfish karmas is the ego.

Manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are attached to karmas. The change in the karmas is due to the gunas manifesting in the mind. They are analyzed by the lower mind. They are held within the mind as desire and memory, and the effort to fulfil them is through the ego. These four components of the mind are in two parts: lower experience and higher experience. The lower qualities in the lower experience of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara bind one to the world. The higher qualities of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara liberate one from the world. These are two states of the mind.

Most beings are stuck at the lower level, where all the propensities are directed towards oneself. At the apara level, self-satisfaction and selfishness are the main feelings. The 'I' element predominates. Thoughts are for pleasure, effort is made for pleasure, the intellect is used for pleasure, the

chitta recalls pleasurable memories and wishes they could be repeated, and ahamkara runs after status, recognition, name and fame. People live at the level of the lower mind, intelligence, memories and ego.

The sages, however, say that it is possible to have a higher experience in which one can free oneself from the state of self-orientation and connect with the transcendental nature and the sensorial world in an appropriate manner, which brings about spiritual inner evolution. The basis of sadhana is to take one away from the lower mind and to become established in the higher mind. At the lower level of the *mudha* or dull and inert state of the mind, intellect, memory and ego, one has to manage the karma of buddhi, chitta, manas and ahamkara. Managing the karma created in manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara is known as karma yoga.

For spiritual realization, isn't it necessary to overcome or transcend the mind?

Swami Satyananda: The mind and spiritual awareness are not two different things. At one stage there is milk, at another stage the milk becomes curd, at a third stage the curd is churned into butter, at a fourth stage it is clarified into ghee and finally it becomes part of a meal. In the same way, at one stage there is the gross body, at another stage the *vasanas* or passions, at the third stage the psychic experiences, and at the fourth stage there is the supreme reality. This is just the *atma*, or supreme reality, manifesting itself at different stages. The mind is one of these stages, and the mind cannot be obliterated. One can only purify the mind and remove the dross, the samskaras, and then the *atma* will be revealed as the very nucleus or basis of the mind.

What is the ultimate aim of karma yoga in relation to the mind and consciousness?

Swami Niranjanananda: The aim of karma yoga is not subjugation but sublimation of the mind. It is confined to the mind only, not to the spirit. Spirit is beyond the field of cause

and effect; it is a state of continuity, having no beginning or end. The word 'mind' is used here in its broad sense, as the totality of human experience from birth to death, including past and future impressions. In yoga the states of mind are defined as *jagrat*, *swapna*, *sushupti* and *turiya*. *Jagrat* is the wakeful state, *swapna* is the dream state and *sushupti* is the dreamless state. These three states are confined by time and space, but *turiya*, the fourth state, is beyond time and space while still being a part of the totality of the mind.

The mind has two roles: one is confined and the other is unconfined. One works within the boundaries of time and space while the other is beyond time and space. The experience of both aspects of the mind, whether transcendental or material, is either positive or negative. It is positive in the sense that one likes something and negative in the sense that one does not. For example, if a person sits for meditation and sees heaven and angels, he will like it, but if he sees demons and hell, he will not like it, as the intellect has come in between. He accepts heaven and angels, but negates hell and demons. This is a mistake, as both of these experiences come from the same mind. However, it is human nature to accept one and negate the other. Human nature is based on duality: pain and pleasure, heat and cold, like and dislike, and so on, and it is difficult to be free from it.

In karma yoga, when one attempts to sublimate the mind, one tries to take the whole mind away from the limitations of time and space and merge it with *turiya*, the superconscious mind. That is the aim, the method and the purpose of karma yoga.

What is meant by impurity of mind?

Swami Satyananda: Just as the body has three doshas: *kapha*, mucus, *vata*, wind, and *pitta*, bile, the mind also has three doshas: *mala*, impurity, *vikshepa*, distraction and dissipation, and *avarana*, veiling. These three faults of the mind are inborn. They arise in the mind that is evolving from the crude material of prakriti, composed of sattwaguna, rajoguna

and tamoguna, and they are the major hurdles in spiritual experience.

The first is impurity of mind, which can be handled through karma yoga. Impurity is not used in a religious sense. Everyone has karma chasing them from life to life. Everyone has been programmed by society, whether one is Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, American or Indian. Everyone has been structured, but one cannot structure the deeper mind. When one sits for meditation, everything can be seen and the mind does not stay quiet even for a moment. The mind is distracted; one thought is overshadowed or crossed by another thought. Sometimes there is so much confusion in the realm of the mind that a sensitive person may go insane. So many thought currents are perceived passing through the mind, and each contradicts the other. The schizophrenic attitude, the neurotic attitude and the psychotic attitude can be found in the minds of each and every person.

When one faces a disaster in life, everything explodes. Until that moment, one goes to nightclubs, picnics and life seems to be nice. However, it all blows up when difficulties comes. Where did it all come from? These negative states of mind, like fear, anxiety, doubt, neurosis and psychosis, are expressions of latent impurities. They are triggered by the deep samskaras of the mind, which are the impurities.

Why is it necessary to purify the mind?

Swami Satyananda: The threefold problems of the mind have to be dealt with by a systematic approach to yoga sadhana. The first difficulty and obstruction in spiritual life is impurity of mind, and this has to be eliminated. The mind cannot be purified unless its toxic matter is removed. The toxic matter of the body is released by naturopathy, natural methods of purging or fasting. In order to purify the mind, it is necessary to practise karma yoga. If the mind is not purified of the dross, if the samskaras are not properly resolved, they obstruct the process of inner as well as mundane experience.

Purity of mind has to be attained through karma yoga in order for a person to be able to concentrate. This is important for a householder as well as a sannyasin. During meditation, it is possible to go very deep and very high. One can even forget the body. However, there is a point through which the consciousness cannot penetrate, because one has arrived at that point without resolving and fixing the karmas, desires, ambitions, passions, attachments and tamasic nature, which were missed in earlier sadhana. However, an aspirant who has done karma yoga with detachment and dedication will not have to face them at this point.

With an impure mind a lot of mental problems arise from interactions with people and day-to-day life. The impurities and problems that come up also hinder the mundane experience. For example, one may have a lot of money, a good education, artistic ability and a good family, but there is still unhappiness, as the interactions with life in general are not organized in the light of karma yoga. Karma yoga purifies the mind and, in this way, improves the quality of both meditation and behaviour.

Man is groping in darkness; there are many things he does not know. He tries to understand the secrets of life using the mind – the most incapable tool he has! This mind is not purified; it is a sick mind, and one tries to dive deep into reality with this sick mind. The highest is not reached just by closing the eyes and trying to control the mind. If the mirror is not clean, it is of no use for polishing one's face! Purification of the self is the first rung on the ladder of spirituality, and it begins when one develops the spirit of karma yoga.

How does karma yoga manage the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga is not only physical activity. All the happenings in the subtle realms through which one is alive are also karma. The gunas, instincts, nature and impressions are subtle, and it is only when they interact with buddhi, chitta and ahamkara that any action

begins in life. Until the gunas come into play, the instincts can go on intermingling with each other, but no external change takes place. It is all happening inside, there is no outer manifestation.

The awareness goes to something only when it manifests. No one knows what is happening to a seed sown in the ground. It is only when the sprout emerges that its development can be perceived. Many subtle internal activities take place for the sprout to emerge. The hardness of the seed is broken, its potential to become a tree is harnessed and assimilated, and then the sprout is able to manifest.

No one is aware of what is happening in the subtle realm of the mind; it is perceived when it manifests as a *vikara*, modification or condition of change. Dealing with the mind begins here. People try to meditate as they have learnt that meditation will calm the mind. However, when they meditate they only see the vikara; they are not able to see its cause, so they go on struggling with it. A vikara is like a weed in the garden. If the top of the weed is removed, but its seed is not unearthed from the depths of the ground, it will continue to appear again and again. Sometimes the roots of a weed can be as deep as three feet or a metre and it is hard work to dig it out. A vikara is like the weed; if the top is removed, it will become small and not catch the eye, so one feels free of it, but after some time the same vikara-weed will re-emerge.

Swami Satyananda says that for there to be peace in the home, the husband and wife must have a congenial relationship. Conflict results in sleepless nights until matters are resolved fully. The same principle must be applied to the mind. The relationship with the mind must be congenial. Until one comes to an agreement with the mind there will be conflict. A person spends only sixty or so years with his or her spouse, but the whole life with the mind! If one fights with one's lifetime companion, how will there be peace? The peace of the mind is not disturbed by others; it is disturbed by one's own mind. The experience of conflict is associated with others, but that is only appearance. The cause of

conflict is in fact one's own mind. If the mind is not at peace, there will be sleepless nights and if the mind is at peace, one will sleep well. Others are not to be blamed; rather one's own mind deserves the blame.

Lack of understanding is the cause of suffering, conflict, dislike and hatred. The negative manifestations arise due to internal conflict. Why is one person jealous of another? Why is anger felt for somebody? Why is there hatred for somebody? The fault does not lie with the other person but in one's own mind. Therefore, the mind must be handled carefully, and an agreement must be reached with the mind. The day one comes to terms with the mind, one will not see any conflict or lack of peace anywhere in the world, neither in one's own life nor in the life of friends or family members, within society or in the world.

The mind should be reined in properly, and not left to be free. Restraint, *sanyam*, is necessary in thought, action and behaviour. If there is restraint, the mind is not left free to wander. When the mind is not reined in, it looks for rights. When the mind is controlled, it looks for responsibility. Therefore, managing and coming to terms with the karmas and behaviour of buddhi, chitta and ahamkara is karma yoga.

What is the importance of purification through karma yoga for spiritual realization?

Swami Sivananda: Nishkama karma, the selfless performance of duties, is the first step towards the attainment of beatitude in life. Sri Krishna asserts in the *Bhagavad Gita* that perfection can be attained and one can be established in the atman only after the mind has been purified through the performance of selfless action. If a medical student neglects to study physiology in the beginning, he cannot understand pathology, diagnosis and medicine. The aspirant cannot understand and realize the spirit and object of Vedanta if he neglects to practise nishkama karma yoga to eradicate the impurities of his mind.

Karma yoga is the effective sadhana for *chitta shuddhi*, purification of the mind. The person who practises nishkama karma yoga in the world purifies himself through disinterested work. Performing actions without an eye on their fruits brings about purification of the mind. The practice of nishkama karma yoga destroys sins and impurities of the mind and causes *chitta shuddhi*, or purity of the *antahkarana*. The effects of past actions can only be washed away by fresh virtuous actions done now through karma yoga and *seva*, selfless service. Bad *samskaras* can be purged only through selfless service. There is no other way of purifying oneself and getting rid of unwanted desires.

Selfless service should therefore be done constantly. Peace and serenity come, and one has perfect and vigorous meditation. Only a purified mind, which is free from desires, can engage itself in constant meditation on the *atman*. The practice of nishkama karma removes the impurities of the mind, purifies the heart and destroys the sense of separateness. It expands the heart and breaks the barriers that stand in the way of unity or oneness. The worldly delusion with its births and deaths are soon destroyed. Karma yoga prepares the mind for the reception of light or knowledge of Brahman or the Self.

The practice of karma yoga eventually culminates in realization of the unity of the Self. *Samadhi* comes by itself without any effort for one who is solely absorbed in service and whose heart is purified. Knowledge of the Self dawns in a pure mind.

There is not even an iota of hope of realizing the higher self without self-purification through nishkama karma yoga. How can spiritual experience come when the heart is not free of impurities and the lower nature rid of dross? One first needs to root out egoism, anger, hatred and greed by sincere selfless service. Life has not been lived in vain if one manages to do a little good to ten human beings, destroys one negative trait completely and develops a single positive virtue fully. Ten people in a million hardly ever achieve this much.

What if samadhi and self-realization are not attained? The aspirant should apply himself to karma yoga or seva with heart and soul. Even a little practice with the right mental attitude purifies the chitta. Selfless, desireless actions should be performed to purify the mind. Purity of mind develops if one works in the spirit of nishkama karma yoga. This is a great reward for one's actions. One cannot imagine the exalted condition of a person of pure mind, who has unbounded peace, strength and joy, who is near and dear to God and who will soon receive the divine light.

TOWARDS IMMUNITY

What does karma yoga achieve?

Swami Satyananda: By the study and practice of karma yoga, the impurities of the mind are destroyed and purity is achieved. What are the impurities of the mind? Selfishness, vanity, desires, anger, greed, infatuation, envy, contempt, and so on. Karma yoga is a sublimated form of expression of suppressed passions. By karma yoga, the mind becomes fit to receive the divine light.

How should work be approached?

Swami Satyananda: The principle should be to work splendidly at whatever has to be done at that particular time. 'Not to mind, not to give a mind and not to be mind-minded' is all that should be kept in mind. More and more time has to be given to the work at hand as every immediate task is important. Yet to abide by this principle is not as easy as many may think.

Blessed is he who is always neck deep in work. Thrice blessed is he who has lost himself in work. Such a person will be given dynamism. People do not need rest at all, but they badly need work. Work confers immunity from evil influences. Work awakens willpower and paves the way towards intuition. Work of any virtue does purify the soul. Work saves the soul.

Why is karma yoga the fundamental method for purifying the mind?

Swami Satyananda: Karma is the cause of ignorance and illusions. The karma, which has always existed, has no connection with one's senses or relationships in life. One may or may not be aware of karma and its accumulation, but man's evolution and downfall are caused by karma. How can that screen of obstruction be removed? Karma, action, does not beget any seed or consequence when it is done with selflessness, not for oneself but for others. The results of selfless karma are sterile; the personal ego and attachment are not involved in the action, and no more karma is generated. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:7):

*Yogayukto vishuddhaatmaa vijitaatmaa jitendriyah;
Sarvabhootaatmabhootaatmaa kurvannapi na lipyate.*

One who is devoted to the path of action, whose mind is pure, who has conquered the self, subdued the senses and realized the Self as the Self in all beings, though acting, is not tainted.

Where will unhappiness come from? Where will pain be generated? Selfless action is an important form of yoga for purification of the mind. During meditation, karmic forces are released which can otherwise cause hallucinations and illusions, as well as mental depression or psychological problems, causing one to go to a mental hospital.

The mental energy is cleansed by the karmic forces. For example, if a person is constipated and keeps on eating, he will need some outlet, maybe through vomiting, purging or diarrhoea. He may take some medicine to help cure the diarrhoea, which gives him a headache, so he takes a bit of aspirin. When he has another pain, he takes another kind of medicine and has backache. The toxin is travelling through the body. If *shankhaprakshalana*, cleansing the alimentary canal with saline water, is done, there will be no vomiting, diarrhoea, headache, pain in the

chest, acidity, gastric ulcer, peptic ulcer, duodenal ulcer or any kind of disease. The toxic substances in the system need an outlet, either natural or unnatural. In the same way, the mental energy needs an outlet, and karma is the natural outlet.

When karma is done for a selfish purpose, it is an outlet. When it is done with selfless motives, it is also an outlet. Both karma with self-intent and karma with selflessness are outlets, but there is a difference. Karma with selfish motives keeps generating and regenerating further karma, and more toxins accumulate in the individual. Karma with selfless motives does not generate further karma. Therefore, karma yoga is necessary to purify the chitta.

Why should karma yoga be practised and not just meditation?

Swami Satyananda: If an aspirant just meditates and does not practise karma yoga, his samskaras will affect the quality of his meditation. The samskaras come out as soon as one begins to achieve samadhi, as they have not been cleared away from time to time during the process of daily life. When an aspirant practises karma yoga in the ashram every day, he may have anger, hatred or jealousy, but every now and again these are cleared away. He goes on analyzing his behaviour and purifying the mind in relation to karma yoga, and by the time he arrives at the state of awakening, he will have already cleared away most of the negative tendencies and the awakening will not cause any adverse effects.

The great swamis, who did not involve themselves in karma yoga, were faced with this problem, while the ordinary swamis, who were involved in karma yoga, were not. Everybody, even if they cannot live in the ashram and practise karma yoga, should order their life, their relationships with family and profession in such a way that the soul is constantly being purified. Later on, they will not have to encounter this problem in spiritual life.

What is the purpose of karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The purpose of karma yoga is to develop immunity from the reactions. How many people are immune to the reactions of other objects and people? They react to whatever a person says and are not immune to what is said. If somebody says good things, they react and respond; they are elated, happy, the ego is bloated. When somebody says a harsh word, they feel dejected and depressed and their ego is deflated. People are always influenced by the inputs of others. Developing immunity from that is karma yoga, not just sweeping the floor. Karma yoga is necessary in order to confront the mind. It is necessary to subject oneself to an external discipline as well. If one can maintain peace, one is a karma yogi. If one is agitated, one must keep trying and trying until balance and immunity are attained.

How can one become immune to the effects of karma?

Swami Sivananda: Generally, work brings either pleasure or pain as its effect or fruit. Each action adds a little to the bondage of samsara. This is the inexorable law of karma. However, through the practice of karma yoga, the effects of the karmas can be wiped out, and karma becomes barren.

The same work, when done with the right mental attitude and spirit, without attachment and expectation, without the idea of doership and with balance in success and failure, does not lead to bondage. On the contrary, it purifies the heart and leads to immunity. There is no need to be agitated over remarks and criticism. To bear insult and injury is spiritual strength. To be moved by trifles, worry for months and waste energy uselessly is not wisdom. In karma yoga those who criticize should become one's best friends.

What is inner purification?

Swami Niranjanananda: Purification has to take place from within at all levels. A person may be unable to understand how purification begins from inside, but it is simple. If an

aspirant has a bad experience in his sadhana, he may not look forward to that sadhana anymore. If he has a bad experience with somebody, he tries to avoid that person. At the same time he tries to be pure and accepting, which is a contradiction. On the one hand he says, “Everyone is equal,” and on the other hand he says, “I know more than you, so who are you to tell me what to do?” That is a contradictory philosophy. It is an intellectual concept, not an experiential realization. Karma yoga is a process of experiential realization, a stepping stone towards developing and attaining spiritual awareness. The theory of karma yoga is to help develop immunity to the effects or results of karmas.

How does karma yoga help one to deal with the samskaras?

Swami Satyananda: Another purpose of karma yoga is to deal with the inner life. In a garden, one digs the earth, sows the seeds, adds manure, removes the weeds and watches over what one has created even to the extent of night vigils. This is simply a reflection of what one is doing internally. There is a wild, uncultivated garden within the mind, where all kinds of weeds and thorny bushes grow. These weeds do not allow any flowers, fruits and beautiful plants to grow, so they have to be cleared out. What happens when one sows good seeds, good samskaras and karmas in this garden? The little animals that live in the forest come out at night and undo the work that has been done during the day. What are these animals that come during the night? The first is desire, the second is frustration and the third is attraction to sensual life. That is why it is said in the Upanishads, “Do not sleep by night.” The inner life, the inner garden, has to be carefully tended and watched over in exactly the same way as one takes care of the garden.

How does karma yoga purify the mind?

Swami Satyananda: One of the problems of the mind is impurity, and this has to be eliminated. Impurities are

embedded in the mind and cannot be seen unless one is confronted by certain situations. Supposing a person never becomes angry, but when confronted by a certain situation, he experiences anger. This means that anger, jealousy, greed and passion are embedded in the personality. The personality will have to be cleared of these impurities, so the path of karma yoga is important. In karma yoga one has to be involved with many things. Karma yoga cannot be practised alone; it has to be practised with other people.

While practising karma yoga, many trials, failures and accomplishments are experienced as one's real personality emerges. One realizes that one has attachments, desires, jealousy, anger, violence and passion. One has a weak mind, is nervous, cannot take failure, handle victory or become accomplished. The whole personality is exposed during the practice of karma yoga. When practising karma yoga, one realizes and understands one's nature, personality, samskaras and weaknesses. These problems cannot be realized without exposing oneself in karma yoga.

What happens when a person takes a purgative? He goes to the toilet ten, fifteen or twenty times and everything comes out. Similarly, there has to be some catalyst which will excite the karma. Passion, anger, jealousy and greed are karma. There is a long list of karma. How can this karma be released, or does one go to the grave with it? Can samadhi be attained with this karma, passion and greed? No, one has to take a purgative and throw them into the toilet. The karmas with one's wife, husband, children and good or wretched friends are expelled by the purgative. This has to be the attitude, and then passion is not passion any more; nothing is maya and nothing is worldly. Why does a person marry? To transcend passion. Why does a person amass wealth? To transcend greed.

Those who do not practise karma yoga, but only retire to a monastery or a forest to practise meditation cannot know the influence of their samskaras. They meditate for years and years, but nothing happens. They go to one level and

stop there; they cannot go further. When karma yoga is not practised either in the family or in the guru's ashram, and the spirit of karma yoga is completely absent, one cannot purify the mind.

How does one develop immunity from situations or influences?

Swami Niranjanananda: By coming out of the self-centred perceptions in which other people or objects don't exist and the centre and focus of life is oneself. When one is able to move beyond the self-focused, self-centred awareness, one begins to develop immunity to situations, events and ideas.

What is expressed and eliminated through the practice of karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Actions expel the instinctive, animal nature of man. In the human structure, there exists an animal nature in the form of habits, manners, desires, instincts and unconscious impressions. There is an animal instinct in man due to desires and samskaras, which is termed a natural tendency. Due to this, man neither knows himself nor can he be liberated from his bondage. This animal nature can only be expelled by performing actions. When a spiritual aspirant does not practise karma in this light, the long held suppressions do not find proper expression and the personality will not be integrated. Karmas are a necessary and integral part of the process of self-illumination.

Generally, it is believed that a person works for the sake of a nation, country or community. This is a materialistic belief. Spiritually, the great thinkers believe that karma is the expression of the lower nature. By performing actions for a long time, the accumulated karmas are exhausted and the personality becomes freer to carry on with the higher schemes of spiritual life. Through self-analysis, it is found that karma means not only the simple daily routine or duties, but the force of desire that motivates them. Karma expresses the thoughts, desires and deep-rooted ambitions, which

otherwise would have remained embedded and dormant in the personality for a long time.

A person wants to fulfil various desires, to know and realize many ambitions. If he suppresses his desires, the development of his individuality is impeded. If he replaces or sublimates his desires through karma yoga, the inner impurities can be rooted out and his spiritual sadhana will progress along with purification of the mind. Performing selfless action exhausts the karmas and desires and the mind becomes purified, which leads to peaceful and pleasant experiences.

Why does one have to face one's personality?

Swami Satyananda: In order to purify the mind, one will have to know oneself. This life of attachment, detachment and involvement is a means to make one understand one's instincts. In every person there are certain latent impurities, passions and desires. The individual is not able to express them. Instead, he is used to suppressing them, as the social ethics and morality have trained him to do so. Therefore, his mind is full of explosives. When he practises karma yoga, he is expressing his body and mind. He is not creating tension and fighting with his conflicts. He grows side by side with the instinctive passions and desires, but internal purification is taking place at the same time, and the result is mental balance.

Mental balance is of two kinds. One kind is the psychological process in which a person tries to maintain balance of mind for good health, good relationships, a good home and a good society. He maintains a compulsory mental balance externally, although everything is totally unbalanced and in turmoil internally. The second kind of balance is attained when purification of the mind takes place by a constant, relentless and prolonged process of elimination of karma. That purification results in real mental balance. When one has a bad stomach, it is uncomfortable. One passes bad wind, has bad dreams and the liver and other parts of the

body are affected. The practice of shankhaprakshalana is used to cleanse the stomach completely and relieve the symptoms. Similarly, the mind cannot be cleansed without undergoing a process of purging.

Purging is a lot of pain in the mind, bad dreams in the night, or frequent bouts of anger. In this way, nature has created many ways of purging. An aspirant may think they are unethical and immoral, barbaric and savage. Passions, desires, anger, frustration, disappointment, greed, jealousy and fears are all outlets created by nature for human beings to practise mental shankhaprakshalana. They are nature's way of cleansing.

How does one cleanse the mind? In bhakti yoga there is no such provision for cleansing. Here God is fine, His glory is fine, His creation is fine, His devotees are fine, the sanctum sanctorum is fine, and the flowers and the priest are fine. Everything is so nice. In raja yoga everything is wonderful and clean. There is physical and mental purity, truth, non-violence, celibacy, contentment, abstention from greed and non-aggrandizement. One may understand how nice these systems are, but that is not facing life. One is not facing oneself, as everything is so nice.

In karma yoga, however, one faces everything. "This person talks like a big boss. He eats like a glutton, and when I go for food, the vegetables are finished. I am working just as hard as he is. When I eat twenty chapattis, he looks at me. I am working on the building and he is going away and talking to that girl. He doesn't work. I'm working so much while he is having a nice time with her." This mental process can only be faced in karma yoga, when one is involved with the affairs of life, when one's body and emotions are engaged and when one is relating to every Tom, Dick and Harry.

At that time, a clear classification of one's sattvic, rajasic and tamasic nature can be made. One can look closely within and observe one's behaviour impartially and without judging. One can see on which level the mind is floating. Sometimes it is full of remorse and guilt, sometimes it is

arrogant and sometimes it is idiotic. Sometimes one is like a demon, sometimes a gentleman and sometimes even a saint. The process of the threefold universal nature of a person can only be realized in karma yoga. If one does not know oneself in external life, how can one purify the mind?

What is purity of mind?

Swami Satyananda: Purity of mind is not ethical purity or some arbitrary standard of thought. *Atma shuddhi*, purity of the self, means that the mind is free from the influence of samskaras and *prakriti*, or nature, the manifest universe. What happens when the mind becomes pure? Clarity, purity and concentration arise. When the mirror is cleansed, one's face can be seen. If the mirror is not cleansed, the face cannot be seen. Through karma yoga the personality becomes purer and purer, day by day, until unbroken peace of mind is experienced. Sage Vasishtha says to Sri Rama in *Yoga Vasishtha* (3:114:76):

*Tishthatastava kaaryeshu maastu raageshu ranjanaa;
Sphatikasyeva chitraani pratibimbaani grihnatah.*

Employ your mind in your duties, without being tarnished by your attachment to any; but remain as the unsullied crystal, receiving the reflections of outward objects, without being stained by any.

How does karma yoga affect the mind?

Swami Satyananda: In karma yoga, daily work is performed with constant awareness and, at the same time, without any expectation of reward. It is this living in the present which enables far more effective, efficient and powerful actions. By totally absorbing oneself in the work at hand, the power of the ego tends to be reduced. This is the essence of karma yoga, and it results in fewer emotional and mental upsets in life. It helps to make the mind more calm and peaceful under any circumstances and more receptive to the practices of yoga. This in itself can lead to meditation.

Karma yoga develops the faculty of concentration, which is essential in all fields and spheres of life. Most people have a mind that can be compared to a river with a large number of currents. These currents continually react, clash and oppose the mainstream flow. The result is incessant disturbance, turmoil, friction and loss of energy. If engineers want to tap the power of the river to supply electricity, they have to channel the water flow into one powerful and unified current with as few currents as possible. They have to build and install a turbo generator, which converts the energy of the flowing river into electrical energy so there is a transformation of energy. It is the same with the mind.

Normally the mind is disturbed by endless thought currents, which continually interact with each other. The fluctuating mind lacks unified power, but this situation can be changed. The mind can be made powerful by channelling the thought currents, so that they flow in one harmonious stream without conflict. The mind has to be concentrated until it becomes a perfect instrument with an integrated single thought flow. This is the role of karma yoga. A concentrated and powerful mind transforms one's experience of life. It leads to things one does not expect, just as it is difficult to understand how the electrical energy that lights up the house and drives the household gadgets can possibly come from the energy of flowing water.

Karma yoga, as well as other forms of yoga, develops willpower. The importance of individual willpower is often overlooked. Few people really know what it is. Willpower can be defined as the ability to motivate, mobilize and harmonize one's activities for the attainment of a definite purpose. The aim of karma yoga is to channel the thoughts and actions, so that the mind helps instead of hinders. The mind of a karma yogi becomes a one-pointed perfect receiver and reflector of experience and higher awareness.

Karma yoga is a method of harnessing the potential of the mind. Each person has access to this incredible power and knowledge, yet most people never contact it. Karma

yoga is the method of unleashing it and using it. The potential is already there waiting to be discovered and used. Swami Vivekananda said, "All work exists simply to bring out the power of the mind which is already there and to wake up the soul."

How can the reactive nature be overcome?

Swami Niranjanananda: Everyone does karma from the time they are born until the time they die. No one is free from karma or the reactions to karma. People are so involved and engrossed in karma that they have become reactive beings, reacting to situations most of the time and not applying their wisdom. The purpose of karma yoga is to avoid the reactive response and to incorporate the component of wisdom in karma. When wisdom is applied to karma, there is no reaction. When duties are performed without any negative or positive feedback, one is free from the influences of these actions.

The concept of karma yoga is the cultivation of *pratipaksha bhavana*, substituting the opposite attitude to the existing one. When a person performs actions, he always reacts to the situation or to his mind, and that reaction is generally negative. However, if he can cultivate or visualize the opposite *bhavana* or attitude while he is reacting, the negative result will not have an effect. He may be called a dog or a donkey, but it won't affect him. Rather, he has the ability to change the negative reaction, which according to yogic theory is called *pratipaksha bhavana*, cultivating the opposite behaviour. This makes one free from reactions and gives immunity to the effects of karmas.

True karma yoga is only performed when one is free from prejudices and predilections and when karma is performed as duty and nothing else; otherwise karma is conditioned action. There is struggle and effort, which leads to dissatisfaction and lack of peace. Karma yoga is where contentment and peace become an integral part of the actions. The act of sweeping is not karma yoga in itself. The attitude with which it is done will determine whether

or not it becomes karma yoga. If someone is sweeping, but feels that it is not the right job for them and is unhappy while doing it, it is not yoga. Yoga is when the job is done spontaneously as something that needs to be done, without emotions and thoughts attached to it.

Milarepa was asked by his guru, Marpa, to make a stone hut on top of a mountain. To do this he had to carry stones up from the bottom of the mountain. He did that diligently and constructed the house. When the house was ready, Marpa said to him, “No, I don’t like the location of the house. The base of the mountain is better. Carry the same rocks down and reconstruct the house at the bottom of the mountain.”

Most people would have left the guru, saying, “What is this? Making me carry rocks from the bottom of the mountain to the top and from the top to the bottom! He does not appreciate or accept anything I do.” Milarepa, however, cultivated pratipaksha bhavana, opposite thinking. He was not deterred. He did not feel anything. No reaction, no response. He said, “This is the mandate; I am going to do it.” He continued with the same feeling of sincerity, innocence and service. It was the attitude of karma yoga that ultimately made Milarepa great.

Karma yoga is not working hard twenty-four hours of the day. A karma yogi cultivates pratipaksha bhavana so that he is not influenced or affected by the results and effects of his actions, behaviours, attitudes and responses, and is able to maintain a tranquil state of mind. His expectations take on a motivational force, an inspirational force rather than a negative force, and he acts with freshness, creativity and purity. Karma yoga is a way of developing immunity from the karmas and from the reactions of karmas.

What are the stages of karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first stage of karma yoga is the awareness that “I am involving myself, I am performing this particular act,” not only in major ways but also in minor

ways. For example, half a minute ago I was reclining and then I moved while speaking. It was not an unconscious movement. People often do things unconsciously, like moving their hands. But while I am talking, I am aware of where my eyes are, where my hands, fingers and feet are, of my body posture. That is one example. Therefore, awareness has to become part of any movement, whether it is moving a hand, working on a computer or sweeping the floor. The area of awareness has to expand and enlarge.

The second stage is involvement and participation. Involvement in karma requires one-pointed focus and attentiveness. There must be the understanding that whatever is being done, it is for the very first and last time in one's life. There is only one opportunity, so one acts to the best of one's ability even though it may be routine work. People's natural inclination is to get bored quickly due to routine and they become conditioned and mechanical.

The third component is discrimination, knowing how much one needs to be involved, which methods will make the involvement efficient and lead to completion of the task, and ultimately when to end the involvement. Discrimination implies observation of the situation and analysis of the appropriateness of one's participation.

The fourth aspect is detachment, which happens when one is aware of one's direction in life. The SWAN principle helps one to understand oneself, one's strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. One learns to separate needs from aspirations, to use one's strength to cultivate awareness and discrimination and to transform a weakness, either to assist with growth or to change a condition or habit. Discrimination and detachment should be supported by the SWAN principle in order to have a clear picture of what one hopes to achieve in life and from where one can detach. The final stage is cultivating the attitude of a karma yogi. The personal effort and the environmental or cosmic connection with it can be observed. A farmer has to undertake all the necessary preparations regardless of the weather and climate.

After completing the work, he has to wait. If everything is conducive, success is in his lap. If things go wrong, failure is in his lap. At this point equipoise of mind has to be maintained, which is the biggest challenge of life.

In hot weather one removes clothes, but in cold weather one puts on another layer in order to remain comfortable. Either something is removed or something is added. Awareness plays a major role here. There is no one system for practising karma yoga. It will change according to the situation and environment, but the mind has to be flexible. If one can adjust and adapt to changing situations, one develops immunity from karma. Everyone is hoping to reach that state where the karmic bondages are cut and one is free, spiritually enlightened.

How does karma yoga help to develop immunity?

Swami Niranjanananda: An important component of karma yoga is developing immunity to situations that normally affect one deeply and internally, by coming out of the self-centred perception in which other people or objects do not exist. When one is able to move beyond a self-centred awareness, one begins to develop immunity to the events and ideas that affected one before.

Karma yoga is related to actions that are performed. If I say something bad, no one will like it, but if I say something good, everyone will like it. It means there is no immunity to what I am saying or to the action I am performing. How it is received is a reaction to my action. If immunity can be developed, karma becomes karma yoga; otherwise it is only a head-trip, an intellectual concept that one is doing karma yoga. Karma yoga is not just a change of attitude, hard work or selfless service; it is a method by which immunity to the effects of karma can be developed.

One becomes immune by involving oneself in action with awareness and conviction and by being the seer or observer of the karma. How does the action affect one's attitude? What kind of thoughts and emotions does it create?

One is not immune to the effects of karma, but when one does become immune, it means that karma yoga has been perfected. Work becomes karma yoga when one is able to work perfectly without the association of craving, ego or desire, and without being concerned if the result is good or bad. When one tries to perform an action with awareness, perfection and a sense of duty, it is karma yoga. When karma yoga becomes natural, spontaneous and effortless, one will develop immunity to action. Karma yoga is not the yoga of action; it is a way of developing immunity to the effects and influences of action.

MENTAL HEALTH

What is health?

Swami Sivananda: Health is a state of mind, a state of inner wellbeing which enables one to function, to do one's work without moaning and grumbling. Health is not just the body being declared medically free from illness.

What attitude should one have to the negative expressions of one's personality?

Swami Satyananda: When the purging of karmas begins, the psychological problems that are experienced now and then do not have to be treated. One should just let them be. If there is fear, one has to face it and not try to eliminate it. The more one tries to remove it, the more one suppresses it. If there are passions, they should be expressed, and not suppressed through religious morality and puritanism. Hatred and jealousy are within, and do not have to be imported. They are a part of the personality which is coming out like a boil. When it is time for it to come up, it should be allowed to come! Why suppress it?

Why go to a doctor and talk about one's mental problems? What can he do? He will just ask many questions. One may feel better or not, but that is not the correct approach. Nothing in life has to be cured; everything has

to be expressed. A person without fear, jealousy, hatred, ambition, desires and passions would be an idiot! A person becomes fearless and transmits fearlessness to others only in the sattvic state, where there is no fear of anyone and no one is afraid of him. That person is loving, charitable and compassionate. He has no enemies; everyone is himself. However, telling people to behave like that now would create confusion in society as there are only a few people capable of practising it without suppression. Few people can truly say, "I have no passion or ambition." The rest would be exploited and killed.

The purpose of karma yoga has to be understood in relation to the evolution of consciousness. Desires and passions are not evil; they are expressions of consciousness in relation to spiritual evolution. A child has no beard or moustache, but develops them when he grows up. One does not worry about it. The experiences that one faces in day-to-day life on the mental, emotional, intellectual and even the demonical plane indicate the evolution of one's consciousness. If they are suppressed, spiritual progress will be retarded. If they are expressed, spiritual progress advances.

There comes a moment in life when these traits become feeble and one begins to step into another area of awareness which is beyond jealousy, greed, hatred, fear and passion. They have not been overcome, they are still part of one's being, but at the same time one has stepped into another dimension called self-awareness, or *atmanubhuti*. Atmanubhuti means the experience of a deeper substance, a deeper element, a deeper stage of one's personality, which is much subtler than the body, mind and emotions. When one becomes aware of this experience, one has to step out of regular and continued involvement with events such as fear, jealousy and greed. One does not have to leave home; one just steps out of involvement. Before that one should face the test and bear with the tragedies of one's personality and life. If one faces them, spiritual experience will be faster later on.

Can karma yoga be used therapeutically?

Swami Niranjanananda: The preliminary basis of every form of yoga is therapeutic. The practice of karma yoga is beneficial for mental health and personality growth as it helps to work out the suppressions, inhibitions and complexes. Everyone suffers from personal problems of some kind; it is unavoidable due to conditioning and sensitivity to the environment one lives in. However, these problems can be overcome with karma yoga. If a person sits around worrying about his personal problems, they will only be magnified until ultimately severe depression sets in. Immersion in selfless service, however, frees one from the ceaseless fluctuations of the mind and leads to higher awareness.

When the mind is kept busy with impersonal problems, the personal problems are temporarily forgotten and the mind concentrates on the duty being performed. In this way, the mind grows stronger by using willpower to motivate actions for guru or God. Eventually, when the awareness has increased and one has the ability to witness the mind like a movie, without becoming totally involved emotionally, one will have the strength to look back on problems and face them in a detached manner. Personal problems cause endless suffering only when the mind is weak and dissipated.

Karma yoga, total creative involvement in work, puts an end to personal problems, as it consumes the energy that powers desires. Experiencing pleasure leaves the seed desire to repeat the pleasurable experience, so when one takes pleasure in work, there is the seed desire for more work. Mindful, creative activity provides an outlet for the tensions and talents, and the desires lose their impetus as the energy that impels them is used up. In this way, one becomes quiet down to the depths of one's being, and without even sitting, meditation dawns spontaneously.

What is the power of a positive attitude?

Swami Sivananda: Thought moulds the character. If one entertains noble thoughts, one will develop a noble

character. Negative thoughts develop a base character. This is the immutable law of nature. Therefore, the character can be deliberately shaped by cultivating sublime thoughts. A thought materializes and becomes an action. The mind that dwells on positive and elevating thoughts will lead to good and laudable actions.

One sows an action and reaps a habit. One sows a habit and reaps a character. One sows a character and reaps a destiny. Destiny is of one's own making. It can be improved by entertaining noble thoughts, doing positive actions and changing the mode of thinking.

Why is karma yoga so useful for those with personal problems and mental turmoil?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga is a splendid science if one wants to bypass the vagaries of the mind. If one does not want to know that the mind exists at all, the only way is karma yoga. One can practise karma yoga for one year, two years, three years or five years without a problem and never confront the mind, without knowing it exists at all. During the long years of practising karma yoga, the negative, animalistic or karmic side of the mind becomes feeble. The old habits die, and the karmas do not trouble one any more.

Can karma yoga be used along with other yoga practices for managing depression?

Swami Satyananda: When an action is done with certain motives, it is called karma. However, when actions are done without any motive or personal interest, it becomes karma yoga. When one does action with a motive, one is always aiming for results, and this affects the mind. One is never sure what one is going to obtain or lose. A person who runs a business or a shop has an interest in it. Whatever happens affects and changes the structure of the mind. When karma yoga is practised, the mind remains untainted. This is particularly relevant for anyone suffering from nervous depression and nervous breakdown.

Nervous depression and nervous breakdowns are the consequences of the relationship with the results of karma. Some people have strong minds, so they come out of the crisis. However, many people have weak minds and develop depression if something goes wrong in their life. This may not follow directly: disappointment comes first, melancholy follows, then fear complexes, suicidal tendencies, nervous depression, nervous breakdown, then heart attack and death.

The whole depression syndrome follows as the consequence of one's involvement with the results of karma. Involvement in karma yoga will give immediate relief. In the path of spiritual development, karma yoga is the basic yoga. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the first chapter is 'Vishada Yoga', the yoga of despondency or the yoga of depression. Arjuna enumerates all the symptoms of depression: perspiring, trembling, burning skin and negative thoughts in the mind, such as the death of a family member, a robbery or the house collapsing. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (1:29–31) it says:

*Seedanti mama gaatraani mukham cha parishushyati;
Vepathushcha shareere me romaharshashcha jaayate.*

*Gaandeevam sramsate hastaattvakchaiva paridahyate;
Na cha shaknomyavasthaatum bhramateeva cha me manah.*

Nimittaani cha pashyaami vipareetaani keshava.

O Kesava! My limbs fail and my mouth is parched, my body quivers and my hair stand on end! (29)

The Gandiva bow slips from my hand and my skin burns all over; I am unable even to stand, my mind is reeling, as it were. (30)

And I see adverse omens. (31)

These are the symptoms of the depression that Arjuna was facing, and the seventeen chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* which follow are the treatment of depression. This aspect of life should not be overlooked because depression is not a

simple disease which can be treated with a few medications. Tranquillizers may give relief for the time being, but it won't last, as depression is basically related to the type of personality that the individual is projecting. Depression is an illness, a symptom and an expression of oneself and the type of person one is. If one is suffering from depression, one must come out of it. One must work physically, talk to people, laugh and take an interest in the external things that are important. One will reap the greatest benefit if one does this in the form of karma yoga as taught in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

What is the principle of karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga follows the principle which allows one to harness the potential of the law of continuity. The basic concept of karma yoga is not hard physical work. That is the medium. The basic concept of karma yoga is to acquire a different perception or awareness of the mind, so that boredom does not set in.

There is a connection with the creative aspect of one's nature. Ideas change in relation to oneself and everything around one. The idea that 'this is routine work and I have been doing it for so long' has to change. Even if it is routine work, the aspirant has to believe that it is something he is doing for the very first and last time, and therefore give it the best possible input. Karma yoga directs the continuity of the mind in a more creative direction. The activities of the mind become much more creative, so that dejection, boredom and depression do not set in.

How does karma yoga deal with the limiting mind-stuff?

Swami Satyananda: A person has to do karma yoga in order to improve the nature of karma. Karma yoga is a means to clean the mind of phobias, problems, fears and other disturbing factors. Swami Vivekananda said, "Karma yoga is purifying the mind by means of work." During karma yoga a person has to face many types of experiences, whether good

or bad. From these experiences one can learn about oneself, one's fallibilities and hang-ups.

What is the purpose of karma yoga in the ashram?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga is any action done with higher awareness and for the sake of the work. Work keeps the mind and body occupied. In ashram life, the first function of karma yoga is to control the negative aspect of the mind. One has to work hard on the external, physical plane to transform the excess energy of the mind. If this energy is not provided with some type of constructive outlet, it can easily become destructive. The energy of the mind dissipates itself in all kinds of diversions: attractive and destructive sensual passions, fantasies, and broken, unsteady thinking, without doing anything useful or tangible. When the mind becomes negative, it poses a threat. Dissipation of energy creates unnecessary impressions in the mind and many samskaras are accumulated. When one tries to meditate, or kundalini is waking from its slumber, these impressions explode and pollute the mental background. Therefore, the mind has to be kept totally engaged. Karma yoga aspirants do physical labour in the ashram and at home in order to pacify and control the mind.

What is the role of karma yoga in relation to one's life?

Swami Satyananda: The aspirant should not make two different compartments out of life, saying, "This is yoga and that is not yoga." Yoga is not only the practice of asana, pranayama and meditation. Whatever one does from dawn to dusk is yoga, and that is the theme of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Karma yoga is the philosophy of a person's relationship with life and with everything around him. What attitude should he have towards his work, family, children, problems, enemies and everything else? How should he react in success and failure, love and hatred, victory and defeat? In the path of karma yoga it is important to improve the quality of the mind and the relationships with people in the family and

outside. Karma yoga is the philosophy which fixes one's relationship with everything else in the world in such a way that nothing disturbs the mind at any time, no matter what happens.



2

Identification

ACTOR, DOER AND PERFORMER

Who is the doer?

Swami Sivananda: The mind is the real doer of all actions. It is the experiencer of every condition in the universe, both objective and subjective. The soul is the absolute, which is not affected by any experience of the mind. The mind is mortal, while the soul is immortal. The divine will works everywhere. Separation from the body does not mean the death of a person. The body is not the real doer of anything. What really does actions is never destroyed.

Why can a person not be the doer?

Swami Satyananda: There is a universal force which is compelling a person to move, to act and to think. Everything is happening spontaneously. A person thinks he is doing the action; however, if he goes a little bit deeper, is honest with himself and puts aside his ego, he will realize that he is not doing anything, but that things are happening. He is only identifying himself with the action and thinking, "I am doing it."

There is an analogy about a man inside a train, running along the aisle with his luggage on his head. Someone asks him, "Why are you running?" and he replies, "I want to go faster and reach the destination quicker."

The involvement of the ego is so great that one identifies with each and every thing that is happening in life, with every commotion and every emotion, with everything one does: one is happy or unhappy; one is great or not great. If this 'I' is everything, where is the universal force which controls everything within the body? The digestive system is not under one's control, for if it becomes constipated one does not know how to relieve it. One cannot even remove constipation. For a headache one needs aspirin. How can one say that things are under one's control?

If a person is the doer, the actor, the perpetrator of an action, he should be in control of each and every thing. He creates the headache and he removes it. If he has a fever, he can let the fever come and throw it off. Who can say to his anger, "No more!" No one can do it, as no one is in control of the happenings in the body and outside the body, before birth, in life and death, and after death. The scheme is there, the plan is there, and one just has to participate in it.

What does 'I am the doer' really mean?

Swami Niranjanananda: Human beings have the peculiar tendency of making themselves the centre of all activity. Each person feels that he is indispensable, and if he did not exist the world would fall apart at the seams. A person tends to project his deep involvement with the world of the senses, the manifest dimension, and the mind within. That is the idea of doership: 'I am doing, I am performing, I am acting and I am indispensable'. A person thinks he is the doer and can do anything to influence his situation, environment and society. He has inflated ideas about himself, especially when he is young and hot-blooded.

In everyday situations, a person becomes the actor. When he identifies with his action, the thought and feeling arise: 'I am the doer, I am the enjoyer – *Aham karta, aham bhokta*'. If he thinks that he can set things right, he follows the dictates of the mind, not of God. However, everything is constantly evolving and changing. If one thinks that eighty years of

life can make a big difference in terms of infinity, one is mistaken. Eighty or one hundred years of life is nothing in relation to infinity. It is not even equivalent to the blinking of an eye of Brahma. In this short span of life, one goes through so much drama, it is incredible!

People become minor gods in their own way in relation to their lives, because they feel that they are in control. Looking at a line of ants, one may wonder what they are thinking. Some may be thinking, "I am indispensable to this world," just as people think. In every person's mind, he is the centre of all activity, and he tries to make others believe this. It is like one ant saying to the others, "Look, I am the centre." The person who is observing the ants and reading their thoughts has a good laugh, shows them his thumb and says, "You may think that you are the centre of everything, but I have the ability to squash you any time."

This is what God does with people too; His thumb is death. Somewhere above everyone's head this thumb is waiting, wondering how far a person can go with the game of believing that he is the centre, in control of his actions and karmas, and able to channel his samskaras. Suddenly, when God has had enough, He brings His thumb down and the person lives no more.

Who are the five doers?

Swami Satyananda: If a person considers himself to be the doer, he will suffer and worry. But if one knows the doer, one will also know the enjoyer. In ignorance, people regard themselves as the doers. If they have not been fools in any other manner, it is here that they have made fools of themselves. What vanity! Somebody else does the work and they call themselves the doers? They really believe that in this world the work is done through them.

This life is a limited company of five shareholders with four companions. If one of them tries to exercise his right, he will be thrown out. The fulfilment of actions is achieved through these five means. It has been said that if these five

combine and act, there would be no experiences of joy or sorrow, victory or defeat. In this mental attitude the question of good or bad results does not arise. The body, the jiva, the five *tattvas*, elements, the ten pranas and the Unseen One, through these five instruments, actions are accomplished. People have wrongly believed themselves to be the doers and the enjoyers. These five and no one else are the doers of actions.

In what way is life just a play?

Swami Satyananda: A person is always so worried about himself, but he does not know that everything in his life has already been decided. The script of one's life has already been written. People are actors; someone is the hero and someone is an extra. The director has already made his choice for each role. Action comes in the script. After all, an actor who appears in a television program has to act and perform karma. When someone writes a script, it includes love, marriage, conflict, murder and death. An actor enacts every role. No one performs actions independently. One owns nothing and yet one thinks that one is the doer. Everything is written in the script: ego, Kamsa, Ravana, Sita, everything. God has put every element in His script.

No one is independent or has the qualification for being independent. In the case of an extremely powerful person, such as Sage Vishwamitra who could create a second world, the statement "I am the doer" might make some sense. As far as the ordinary person is concerned, he requires a pill to handle a small headache. He does not know how to remove his sorrow, hopelessness or depressive thoughts. Yet he claims to be the doer. A thought comes from nowhere, catches him in its grip and he is depressed. He doesn't even have the means to remove a small thought from his mind and he claims that he is not part of the script! The depression is part of the dialogue, part of his act in the play.

An actor does not have any real motivation in the part that he plays. Motivation is not the result of one's will, but it exists. Every living being has the quality of motivation,

including a small insect. One may ascribe motivation to the brain, mind or education, but the basic motivation comes from somewhere else; it is natural to a living being. Actions, motivations and karmas are based on one factor. The director decides when the shot will be fired, when the marriage will be held, when a fight will follow, when someone will turn into a good person, when there will be laughter or tears, when the actors will dance, eat or leave the stage. This is the truth, whether or not one accepts it.

An actor has to become one with the character to play his part. He has to feel that this woman is his wife; he has to awaken that feeling. The emotions have to be awakened; there needs to be total identification with the part. Everyone goes through this identification, but in the process one begins to associate so deeply with the script of life and becomes so identified with it that one does not realize that it is just a play. The day one realizes that life is a play, one's perspective will change.

How are the bodily actions performed?

Swami Sivananda: A karma yogi should have a detailed knowledge of the nature and workings of the *karmendriyas*, the five organs of action: (i) *vak*, organ of speech, (ii) *pani*, hands, (iii) *pada*, feet, (iv) *upashtam*, organ of generation, and (v) *payu* or *guda*, anus, the organ of excretion. The real indriyas are in the astral body, or *linga sharira*. They are subtle, *sukshma*, and have corresponding centres or counterparts in the brain. The organs that one sees outside, mouth, hands, feet, reproductive organ and anus, are the *bahya karana* or external instruments.

The *karmendriyas* are located in the *pranamaya kosha*, or vital sheath, and are moved by prana. Without prana, they cannot move even a fraction of an inch. The *karmendriyas* are the five soldiers and the commander-in-chief is the mind. The mind extracts work from these soldiers when it desires sensual objects for its gratification. The mind is the leader or the big dacoit and these five organs are his assistants. The

karmendriyas execute immediately the commands of their leader, the mind. The mind works in unison with these five organs. The karmendriyas cannot act without the healthy and willing cooperation of the mind, which works through these organs. The mind plans, schemes and suggests the activities. During sleep, the karmendriyas are temporarily dissolved into the mind. In *samadhi*, the superconscious state, they are absorbed into the mind. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:13–15, 18) it states:

*Panchaitaani mahaabaaho kaaranaani nibodha me;
Saankhye kritaante proktaani siddhaye sarvakarmanaam.*

*Adhishthaanam tathaa kartaa karanam cha prithagvidham;
Vividhaashcha prithakcheshtaa daivam chaivaatra panchamam.*

*Shareeravaanmanobhiryatkarma praarabhate narah;
Nyaayyam vaa vipareetam vaa panchaite tasya hetavah.*

*Jnaanam jneyam parijnaataa trividhaa karmachodanaa;
Karanam karma karteti trividhah karmasangrahaah.*

Learn from Me, O mighty-armed Arjuna, these five causes, as declared in the Samkhya system for the accomplishment of all actions! (13)

The body, the doer, the various organs or senses, the different functions or energies of various sorts, and the presiding deity also, the fifth. (14)

Whatever action a man performs by his body, speech and mind, whether right or the reverse, these five are its causes. (15)

Knowledge, the known and the knower form the threefold impulse to action; the organ, the action and the agent form the threefold basis of action. (18)

What is man's function, if he is not the doer of actions?

Swami Satyananda: Arjuna was in a fix, as mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjuna asked Sri Krishna, “Will I not be

sinning if I fight this battle and kill so many people?” Sri Krishna tried to remove this misapprehension and convince him that it would not be sinful. However, Arjuna was so confused that he failed to comprehend the words of Sri Krishna, and finally asked, “Please tell me whether I should fight or not.” Sri Krishna showed Arjuna his immense cosmic form and said to him, “You are only the means, the agent, and not the doer. I am the doer.” Sri Krishna showed him a vision, like a reel of film, in which Arjuna saw that the great warriors, like Bhishma, Drona and Karna, were already dead. They had been killed, although they were alive in the army facing him. Sri Krishna said to Arjuna (11:34):

*Dronam cha bheeshmam cha jayadratham cha karnam tathaan-
yaanapi yodhaveeraan.*

Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha, Karna and other courageous warriors, these have already been slain by Me.

Sri Krishna also explained to Arjuna the significance of what he had shown him in the vision. He said, “Arjuna, you are not the doer. You are just taking part in this drama and playing the role assigned to you. Therefore, stand and fight. Their death is sure, even if you say that you will not fight and you lay down your Gandiva bow.” Arjuna said, “This is strange. When the warriors are dead and that vision already seen, what is the use of my entering the battle?” Sri Krishna replied, “You think that you are the doer, Arjuna, but you do nothing. You are only an instrument. You function as an instrument, a means, and do your part. You should at least realize that you are an instrument, but how can you realize your instrumentality when you think you are the doer?”

After showing Arjuna this vision, Sri Krishna asks him to prepare for war and to act only as an instrument for killing the warriors who have already been killed by Him. Sri Krishna impressed upon Arjuna’s mind that one has to do one’s duty, play the role and act only as an instrument. He told Arjuna (11:33):

*Tasmaattvamuttishtha yasho labhasva
Jitvaa shatroon bhunksva raajyam samriddham;
Mayaivaite nihataah poorvameva
Nimittamaatram bhava savyasaachin.*

Therefore, stand up and obtain fame. Conquer the enemies and enjoy the unrivalled kingdom. Verily they have already been slain by Me. You are merely an instrument, Arjuna!

What attitude should one have towards work?

Swami Satyananda: One of the basic precepts of karma yoga is simple yet profound: don't be attached to the actions and their consequences. When work becomes play, it ceases to be work. Work is generally done with a motive and expectation of results or reward, whereas play is done for its own sake. It is from attachment, not the work itself, that one becomes unhappy and discontented. Work rarely harms anyone – it is the expectations, status and rewards which cause the mental turmoil. Therefore, an important rule of karma yoga is to do the work, but not to become identified with it. Work and its consequences, the fruits, have to be regarded as something completely separate from oneself.

Here is an example: An author has just spent six months writing a book. It is his brainchild and hard work. He is proud of it and it has become a part of him. One day somebody comes along, picks up the book, reads a few pages and, not knowing who the author is, abruptly asks, "What idiot of an author wrote this?" As a result the writer of the book is insulted and angry, his pride has been wounded. There are mental reverberations and besides having a furious argument with the critic of his book, he ends up unhappy and depressed for many days.

The cause of the unhappiness is not really the critic, though of course he might have been a little more diplomatic; the cause lies with the attachment to the book, the fruit of the work and endeavour. If the author had

regarded the book as something completely separate from him, he would not have suffered any upset and anguish as a result of the severe criticism. If he had not considered the book to be part of himself, but only an object outside his body and mind, and only the result of actions performed, the emotional and mental upheaval would not have occurred. It is only a matter of identification, yet wrong identification leads to unhappiness, whereas realistic identification leads to harmony in life situations.

What is the process of karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: One who is in control of the self and who is devoid of desire is a true renunciate who will attain enlightenment. Both points are abstract terms, dealing with the last aspect of karma, the seed of desire.

It is understood that when the journey is begun, the motivating factor is a desire. 'I wish to' is the form of desire. It is not elimination or renunciation of desire but the renunciation of limiting desires that is necessary. One must know the limiting desires that hold one back and the propelling desires that push one forward. This can be done by combining karma yoga with raja yoga, and following the processes of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana.

Throughout the structure of karma yoga, one is simply trying to convert the negative attitude into a positive attitude. Once the conversion into a positive attitude is accomplished, the sattwic quality will take one beyond the realm of the positive nature. It is like using a thorn to remove a thorn that is stuck in the body. The positive nature is better than the negative nature, but it is still limiting.

To deal with the positive nature is easy, but to deal with the negative nature is really difficult. In the process of karma yoga, one is attempting to convert the negative into positive. Once positivity has been attained, the *gunas* take over. Ultimately, it is the *gunas*, or the inherent nature, that takes the aspirant beyond the duality of the positive and the negative and into the state of transcendence.

THE GUNAS

How can the gunas be described in brief?

Swami Sivananda: For a karma yogi a clear understanding of the three gunas and their operations is necessary. One who has knowledge of the three gunas can work in a better and more efficient manner. Prakriti is composed of the three gunas or forces: sattwa, rajas and tamas. *Sattwa* is harmony, light, wisdom, equilibrium or goodness. *Rajas* is passion, motion or activity. *Tamas* is inertia, inaction or darkness. During cosmic *pralaya*, or dissolution, these three gunas exist in a state of equilibrium. During *srishhti*, or creation, a vibration arises and the three qualities are manifested in the physical universe.

The three qualities bring bondage to the *jiva*, or individual soul. Though sattwa is a desirable quality, it also binds the individual. It is a golden fetter. Rajas is the source of attachment and thirst for life and causes attachment to action. Tamas binds the individual to pleasure, *pramoda*, laziness, *alasya*, and sleep, *nidra*. These three qualities are inseparable. No one is absolutely rajasic or sattwic or tamasic. Sometimes sattwa prevails and the person is calm and serene, sits quietly and entertains sublime thoughts. When sattwa prevails, the other two qualities are overpowered. At other times, rajas prevails and the person is active, moves about, plans, schemes and speculates. He craves for power, wealth and action. When rajas prevails, sattwa and tamas are overpowered. When tamas prevails, the person becomes slothful, lazy, indolent and lethargic. When tamas prevails, sattwa and rajas are overpowered. In some people sattwa is predominant, in others rajas, and in others tamas.

If sattwa is predominant at the time of death, one goes to the spotless world of sages. If rajas is predominant, one will doubtless be born among those that are attached to action. If one dies when tamas is predominant, one will be born in the womb of the senseless. The fruit of a sattwic action is harmonious and spotless, the fruit of a rajasic action is pain and the fruit of a tamasic action is ignorance.

It is impossible to rise or jump from tamas to sattwa all of a sudden. One should convert tamas into rajas first. Sattwa is intense activity. Just as the wheel of an engine appears to remain stationary when it moves very swiftly, so also a sattwic person appears to be calm through his self-restraint or control, but he is the most active. He can turn out tremendous work within the twinkling of an eye with full concentration.

It is the gunas of prakriti that operate. Owing to ignorance, the body is mistaken for the higher self. Just as the motion of the clouds is falsely attributed to the sun, so the movements of the body and the indriyas are falsely attributed to the pure inner self. This self is always silent, the witness of all actions and *akarta*, the non-doer.

Who is the doer of karmas or actions?

Swami Sivananda: Prakriti or nature does all the actions through the gunas, the qualities of nature. Nature is responsible for all activities. The higher self is beyond action; it is only the silent witness. The sky remains motionless, but the clouds move across the sky. In the same way, the self is actionless and nature does everything. The *atman*, soul or spirit, is beyond the three gunas; it is the witness of the three gunas. The person who experiences this is the real seer or sage. The person who sees that prakriti performs the actions and the self is actionless, really sees. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:29):

*Prakrityaiva cha karmaani kriyamaanaani sarvashah;
Yah pashyati tathaatmaanamakartaaram sa pashyati.*

He sees, who sees that all actions are performed by nature, prakriti, alone, and that the self is actionless.

What is the proper attitude to have towards actions?

Swami Niranjanananda: Actions pertain to the realm of prakriti. There is no voluntary or conscious control by anyone over action. How the mind and the gunas function

and act is beyond the cognitive field of an individual. Every action that is performed in the world and in various dimensions of the human personality takes place according to nature, prakriti, and its attributes, the gunas.

What is the consequence of believing one is the doer?

Swami Sivananda: The body, mind and organs of action are the products or effects of the three gunas. Through ignorance and lack of discrimination, the mind considers its false personality to be true, becomes egoistic and thinks it is the doer. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:27), Sri Krishna says:

*Prakriteh kriyamaanaani gunaih karmaani sarvashah;
Ahankaaravimoodhaatmaa kartaahamiti manyate.*

All actions are wrought in all cases by the qualities of nature, the gunas, only. He whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks: 'I am the doer'.

This is the cause of bondage. Only the gunas do all actions. Through the force of avidya the ignorant person identifies himself with the body, mind and indriyas, which are the products or effects of the three gunas. The person who identifies himself with the body, mind and senses and foolishly thinks that the higher self is the actor is ignorant. One who sees only with the physical eyes has no inner eye of intuition. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:19) Sri Krishna says:

*Ya enam vetti hantaaram yashchainam manyate hatam;
Ubhau tau na vijaaneeto naayam hanti na hanyate.*

He who takes the Self to be the slayer and he who thinks he is slain, neither of them knows; he slays not nor is he slain.

The problem comes when a person thinks that he is the doer. As he takes upon himself the responsibility for doing good or bad karmas and enjoying or suffering their fruits, he has to enjoy the good and bad fruits of his actions again and again.

How do the gunas relate with the belief that one is the doer of actions?

Swami Sivananda: The knowledge of the three gunas operating in the individual nature is unique and distinctive to the spiritual psychology known to sages, who researched the nature of man. In the course of their observations and practical study, they found that the gunas had to be transcended one after another in their order of progression. The negative ego of the tamoguna prakriti was found to have a strong hold over and expression in the individual in the form of *sthoola abhimana*, the gross self-arrogating sense of doership. In its deep ignorance it would insist upon vaingloriously taking the credit for the movements of the cosmic prakriti, which expresses itself in and through the instrumentality of the human being: “It is I who did this. That was done by me alone. I have done all this.” The strong abhimana of the tamasic ego asserts itself in the early days of darkness and constricted ego-centred living. The gradual renunciation of this strong, vain, self-arrogating sense of doership forms the rock bottom of karma yoga psychology.

How does a person, who knows that he is not the doer, think, move and perform action?

Swami Sivananda: The Lord says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:8–9):

*Naiva kinchitkaromeeti yukto manyeta tattvavit;
Pashyanshrinvansprishanjighrannashnangachchhansva-
panshvasan.*

*Pralapanvisrijangrihannannunmishannimishannapi;
Indriyaaneendriyaartheshu vartanta iti dhaarayan.*

The harmonized knower of truth thinks, ‘I do nothing at all’, while seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing, (8)

Speaking, letting go, grasping, opening and closing the eyes – convinced that the senses move among the sense objects. (9)

He really sees who knows that actions proceeding from the five organs of action, the mind and the intellect are prompted by nature, and that the higher self is actionless. He knows perfectly well that nature or the *gunas* do everything. He thinks, “I am the silent witness of all activities; I am not the doer. I do not do anything. The senses move amongst the sense objects. The qualities or *gunas* move in the senses, which are also products of the *gunas*. I know the essence of the divisions of the qualities and their functions. I am in essence without limbs. How can action or work be ascribed to me? I am without hands, legs, feet, breath and mind. I am ever pure, spotless, immoveable and immutable.”

The wise person, who knows the essence of the divisions of the *gunas*, separates himself from the body, mind and sensory organs. He stands as a witness of these *upadhis*, limiting factors, and their functions by identifying himself with the pure inner self or *atman*. He says, “Seeing, hearing, touching, speaking, giving, grasping, opening and closing the eyes are functions of the *indriyas*. I have nothing to do with it. They are the *dharma*s of the senses. I am distinct from the senses. The senses move among the senses. I am *nirlipta*, striving to be unattached, and I am *asanga*, fully non-attached.” It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:28):

*Tattvavittu mahaabaaho gunakarmavibhaagayoh;
Gunaa guneshu vartanta iti matvaa na sajjate.*

He who knows the truth, O mighty-armed Arjuna, about the divisions of the qualities and their functions, knowing that the *gunas* as senses move amidst the *gunas* as the sense objects, is not attached.

This person has no idea of agency. Even if the act of killing becomes necessary for the peace and harmony of the world, his killing without desire is like the killing of a murderer by the executioner and judge, on behalf of the community, for the preservation of peace and harmony in the world. He would never repent that he has done a wrong action.

His will has become one with the cosmic will of the Lord. Whatever he does is done by the Lord only. He has no will of his own.

He is beyond good and evil and the pairs of opposites, as he has knowledge of the higher self. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:31):

*Anaaditvaannirgunatvaatparamaatmaayamavyayah;
Shareerastho'pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate.*

The Supreme Self, O Arjuna, being without beginning and devoid of qualities, imperishable, though dwelling in the body, neither acts nor is tainted!

He has given up the idea of agency. He treats the body as an instrument of God that is given to him for the fulfilment of His purpose. He attributes his activities to the divine actor within and escapes from the bondage of karma. He is freed from the wheel of birth and death. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (14:19):

*Naanyam gunebhyah kartaaram yadaa drashtaanupashyati;
Gunebhyashcha param vetti madbhaavam so'dhigachchhati.*

When the seer beholds no agent other than the gunas, knowing that which is higher than them, he attains to My Being.

What is the best understanding to have of the performer of actions?

Swami Satyananda: The most important wisdom is that life is a combination of the three gunas. While performing his duties, an ignorant person continues to think that he is doing them, whereas a yogi thinks that prakriti is doing everything. The body, senses, mind and intellect are the instruments of prakriti, but the moment one says that one is the doer, one is bound by the laws of karma. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:16):

*Tatraivam sati kartaaramaatmaanam kevalam tu yah;
Pashyatyakritabuddhitgvaanna sa pashyati durmatih.*

Now, such being the case, the person of perverted intelligence, who looks upon his Self, which is isolated, as the agent, he sees not, owing to untrained understanding.

Adi Shankaracharya said, “As a person traces all actions to the interactions of the energies or gunas, actions do not bind him and do not produce any good or bad effects By virtue of his yoga, he has renounced all actions and is ever watchful of his self.” This is the attitude of a wise man: the eyes see; I am merely a witness.

Purusha is not an actor and not the doer. He does not do anything; he is *sakshi*, the silent witness, but he is a force, like electrical energy. He is the force behind, but he is not *karta*, the doer; nor *bhokta*, the enjoyer. He is just the *drashta*, which means ‘seer’; he sees the whole game. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:13–14):

*Sarvakarmaani manasaa sannyasyaaste sukham vashee;
Navadvaare pure dehee naiva kurvanna kaarayan.*

*Na kartritvam na karmaani lokasya srijati prabhuh;
Na karmaphalasamyogam svabhaavastu pravartate.*

Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing others (body and senses) to act. (13)

Neither agency nor actions does the Lord create for the world, nor union with the fruits of actions; it is nature that acts. (14)

Prakriti is the executive. The syllable *pra* is the prefix, which means ‘intensity’, and *kriti* means ‘work’. Prakriti means the doer. Devotees always believe that God alone does everything and that they do nothing. One should not identify the ego with situations; one should think, “I am

only an instrument, an agent; I am not the doer.” This is the spirit of karma yoga.

How can a sattwic expression of action be achieved?

Swami Niranjanananda: In order to achieve a meditative process in karma yoga, there has to be awareness of the gunas, which are the aspects, qualities or nature of the phenomenal world. These aspects have been divided into three categories: tamasic, meaning a state of inertia or ignorance; rajasic, meaning a state of dynamism and activity combined with full ego involvement; and sattwic, meaning simplicity and equanimity in action.

Simplicity in action is the sattwic karma that the aspirant is trying to evolve. In the course of his growth he begins from the tamasic pattern or frame of mind. Tamasic actions are deluding in nature. They are performed for self-satisfaction and many times harm another individual. They are actions with a limited vision and concept and are subject to the state of ignorance or *avidya*. On a higher level the next form of action is known as rajasic. These actions are performed for the fulfilment of a personal desire with ego, effort, drive, motivation and expectation of a result which is self-satisfying. Most of the world population works on the rajasic level of karma. To go one step beyond the rajasic nature should be the main thrust of a positive ashram type environment, where karma is done without any dislike, hatred or disturbed feelings, and where the karmas or actions flow from one state to the next. Such karmas uplift the whole group; they do not just satisfy or fulfil the ambitions of one individual.

Actions done without any kind of expectation, hatred or dissipation of mind, and which flow from harmony to dedication to compassion and to integration of one's personality, are known as sattwic. It is this sattwic karma which has to be evolved and striven for. Once one is able to strive on this path, one can achieve different states of awareness and realization.

The final statement that the yogas make is to live karmically, trying not to reject the karmas, or to build upon them. The statement, 'Live karmically', is not only yogic. In different traditions such as Tao, Zen, Buddhism, Hinduism or Christianity, the same concept of flowing with life has been emphasized. Generally, what happens is that instead of flowing with life, there is struggle. If there is struggle in anyone's life, one can be assured that the karmas are not sattwic but rajasic. If there is struggle in the mind, thoughts or beliefs, one is living under the influence of rajas. At the time of struggle, actions originate from the ego, which superimposes itself upon one's ideas and beliefs, and therefore, upon one's actions. The aim is to flow with the karmas and nature of life with total awareness and detachment.

TO BE THE INSTRUMENT

What are the two methods to reduce identification?

Swami Sivananda: One should look at one's daily duties as a witness, and observe one's own actions as well as what goes on outside. This is called *sakshi bhava*, where one realizes inwardly that one is different from the active principle. It is the method of Vedanta. There is the other easier but equally potent method of *nimitta bhava*, where one feels that the Lord alone is the real doer of all actions and that one is but an instrument in His hands.

When a person makes a mistake, is it by God's will or his responsibility?

Swami Satyananda: One should not think it is God's doing whenever it is convenient and one's own doing when it is inconvenient. It is better to say, "I am the doer, I made a mistake, I committed a sin and I am paying for the mistake I made", or "I am enjoying the wealth I collected. I am a great scholar due to the knowledge I have gained." One should credit it all to oneself or all to Him. When a person wants to

be responsible, he leaves it to himself, and when he does not want to be responsible, he leaves it to God – this is not the way. The great poet, Bahadur Shah Jafar, says:

*A person should not be considered a human being,
However dutiful he might be,
Who does not remember God in prosperity
And is not afraid of Him when angry.*

What is the idea of being an instrument?

Swami Satyananda: The truth is that everybody's life is predestined. Everybody has their destiny and the script of their life is already laid down. It is the will and wish of God. Everything that happens in life is because God has wanted it, not because one has created it. This is not a philosophy, it is the truth.

How many stars are in this vast universe? How many galaxies exist? How many suns exist? How many planets exist and how many light years is the distance from one planet to another? I am just a small fly, not even a fly. Where does this world exist in that vast structure of the endless universe? Where is the place of this round globe, the earth, and where is the place of India and America? Where is the place of one's district, one's street and house? What is the position of this person and that person? It can be worked out mathematically.

People are specks like tiny, invisible atoms in this vast universe. They are small atoms in God's creation, moving according to His choice, and if they say that this is their choice, it is also because He has allowed them to think that way.

What is the place of effort? What does a traveller do between the time he reaches the airport and the time he is allowed to board the plane? He may look at some newspapers, talk to his friends, spend some time in the restaurant – that is called personal effort. It is the time in between. However, even this personal effort in between is guided.

Personal effort is God's choice. God made Newton discover the law of gravity, but God did it. He did not allow just anybody to do it. It was not Newton's personal effort, but it was God's selection of a person. Mahatma Gandhi became the father of the nation, not anybody else. Many times people pray, "Make me an instrument in Your hands." It means they are asking God to choose some pleasant work for them.

If a person has no responsibility for his actions, why should anyone make an effort in life?

Swami Satyananda: A person may feel that God is the doer and he is the instrument, but that is his personal philosophy and it may not be true. In fact, the absolute is beyond all karma. He neither makes one act nor suffer. Prakriti is the cause of action and everything is happening through her. Prakriti provides the means to act and develops the idea of doership. This is the doctrine of Samkhya. The role of the absolute, or *purusha*, is to remain a silent witness. Therefore, one should not impose all kinds of doership on God. This is an easy way to get out of one's mistakes.

As long as a person has the desire to live, he should not pose as being helpless. If one becomes desireless, one can say that God does everything; otherwise, it is a philosophy by which one cheats oneself. If a person who is totally desireless says that God does everything, he may be right. However, most people have many desires and put the blame for mistakes on God. Therefore, God should be kept out of the picture. He is the universal spirit, untainted.

People are enveloped in ignorance and that is why they are running around. A person who drinks a lot of wine starts jumping, crying, shouting and doing funny things. The next day he blames the shopkeeper who sold the champagne and says, "That man sold me the champagne! I lost all my money; I hurt my head and had an accident!" Such notions really do not help in spiritual life. A person must accept the responsibility for everything he does. A capable

human being endowed with possibilities and capabilities should accept the role of purushartha in his life. Destiny is not all-powerful. As long as an individual is weak he has to live under destiny. Destiny is a great part of this truth, but destiny is not the last word.

Why is it important to see oneself as an instrument?

Swami Satyananda: One way to achieve tranquillity is to know that one is just an instrument in the hands of God, who is the real doer of actions. This is a good view of life. Sri Aurobindo said, “Feel the greater force working in the world and make yourself an instrument for the task to be done.” When one feels that one is not really acting, but is the tool or instrument of something far greater, one becomes detached in all situations. An instrument cannot become angry, upset or egotistical. It is the ego and personal desires that make one react adversely to others and the environment. By thinking of oneself as an instrument of the divine, one works more effectively.

This is the means to harmony, happiness and higher experience. If one considers oneself to be the doer, one will think oneself to be the beneficiary of the fruit of the actions, whether good or bad. By accepting oneself as His agent, one becomes the agent for actions as well as their fruit, whether happiness or unhappiness.

Everyone should consider this truth well. A farm labourer is ploughing his field, sowing the seeds and cultivating the crop, which may be good or bad. There may be a bumper crop or a drought. Who suffers? The doer suffers. Whoever is the doer suffers the loss or uses the gains. Actions lose their strings once the idea of doership is given up.

It is necessary to transfer the idea of doership in order to become free from the links of this great chain of karma. There are many people who worry needlessly. Three-quarters of these unnecessary worries can easily be thrown away. Apprehensions and ruminations are not necessary for anyone's life.

Everyone's life moves on in a predetermined way. Actions, birth and death, happiness and suffering, marriage and children are guided by one law. The whole world, plants, animals, insects or human beings, is controlled by the inexorable laws of nature. In the overall scheme of this great plan, one is only the instrument, the channel, the agent or the actor; one is not the *karta*, the doer.

There is a great nature, prakriti, that is fulfilling the requirements necessary for the universal drama. When one does not realize this truth, one is agitated by insignificant happenings, and insecurity arises. Instead one should say, "Well, what is to happen will certainly happen. I shall see to it when it does. What does it matter? Oh, I have earned so much money. What will happen if all that is lost? If it is lost, let it be lost. I had nothing before. What is the difference? God will help. If my son falls ill and dies, well, he did not exist before and he will not exist in the future. In between, I enjoyed his company and now that is finished."

People worry over worldly objects for so long. Whatever work is assigned should be completed in a proper manner. While suffering some calamity, some sorrowful event, a person has to bear in mind that he is just a servant and he has to do his work like a servant. However, this is more easily said than done; it is actually hard to do. One should follow the path of spiritual life and let nature take its own course. Worry and anxiety are not necessary.

God does everything. He controls thoughts, emotions, senses and everything else. Intelligence is not the doer. It is influenced by emotions and desires. Emotions are the fruit of desires and attachment. One should always know that one is the instrument and He is the doer, whoever He is, whatever His form. By this knowledge alone, the desires of the ego disappear, anxieties vanish and the jiva attains liberation.

One should develop internal and external faith – a smile within and a smile without. One should make one's actions blissful and free oneself from the sense of being the doer. God knows the needs of everyone.

How can one develop the experience of being the non-doer?

Swami Sivananda: One should be ever active and at the same time feel inwardly that one is the non-doer and non-enjoyer. One should feel that the Lord alone is the real doer of actions and that one is an instrument in His hands. God should be felt as the inner ruler, who manipulates the body, mind and indriyas. One should feel that God works through one's hands, eats through one's mouth and sees through one's eyes. One is a toy in the hands of God. He holds the string, He is the *sutradhara*. Therefore, all actions should be done out of a sense of duty. This is the method of *nimitta bhava* by which one's actions are transformed into worship of the Lord, and one is not bound by them. One should work without expectation of any reward and without egoism. By rooting out the idea of agency one is free from the shackles of karma and does not accumulate new karma. The prarabdha karma will be worked out and liberation attained.

On account of egoism, a person thinks that he does everything, and this idea binds him. The ego is found in the personality as a superimposition, as pride, taking credit for everything. However, if a person feels that he is an instrument in the hands of God, that God works through his hands, beholds through his eyes, hears through his ears and smells through his nose, he will be freed from egoism and the bondage of karma. He will attain peace and become one with God. This is the secret of karma yoga and bhakti yoga. Nature urges one to do actions. If one abandons the idea of agency and the fruits of actions, one will be quite safe, and no action will bind. *Abhimana*, egoism, should be crushed by the feeling: "I am nothing; I do nothing. Everything is being done by the Lord. Hari is the *karta*, the doer."

One should work in the world by completely dedicating oneself to the Lord. This is karma yoga, which destroys the ego in the form of abhimana. Rest the mind in the higher self or Ishwara while performing any action. One who has developed pure, poised reason and rests in the inner self is

aware that all actions are performed by the *antaryamin*, the inner ruler, the divine actor within. He is perfectly conscious that God really operates and moves in this body-machine.

Work should be done for the fulfilment of divine purposes without the expectation of any fruit. Everything should be done as *Ishwararpana*, offering to God. One should work for the welfare of the world in unison with the divine will and allow the divine energy to work unhampered through one's instruments. The free flow of divine energy is blocked the moment egoism arises. The body-flute should be kept hollow by emptying it of egoism, so that the flute player of Vrindavan may play freely his tune. Once He works through His instruments, the lightness of work is felt and all responsibilities are washed off. One is as free as a bird.

How can one let go of the notion of doership?

Swami Satyananda: While performing an action, one may easily say, "I am not the doer; I am not the enjoyer," but that is not enough. Karma yoga demands a higher state. One's conviction disappears as soon as there is real trouble, and the intentions are forgotten. The idea that "I am not the one who acts and enjoys" is only an intellectual reminder. It is not a bad thing, but it is not enough and not the whole path of karma yoga.

Renunciation of the doership of action is a rational process. A person detaches himself from the notion of doership. A person of philosophical temperament says, "I am not the doer; God or nature does it." This is a philosophical concept, and maybe a few people can actually renounce the idea of doership, but by and large it remains a rational process. In the beginning this attitude of non-doership may be merely intellectual, but eventually one will discover through experience that it is a sublime truth.

It must be realized through experience that it is He who makes one do everything. One should never believe that one is the doer. One must efface oneself to awaken Him. One does not exist, but the power which works in all things is also working through oneself. First, one should know Him to

be the doer in ordinary matters, and slowly, as this practice matures, one is convinced of being the same entity. Practice reveals this secret. By day and by night one has to remember that He resides unseen within and makes one perform actions. When this idea is firmly rooted in the mind, every act becomes an act of yoga. Whatever a person may be is only that power; he is only the medium and instrument. However, it should not be forgotten that while this force desires to manifest, it also desires to efface.

How does one develop inner awareness of akarta?

Swami Satyananda: It is a strange state of affairs. One does not become the doer just by actions. If one goes on wishing for the fruit of the action, one becomes the doer and suffers the consequences. Wherever a person is working: in a bank, an office or in a factory, he does not become the doer by performing his job or the non-doer by not doing any work. That is the subtlety of it! There is someone within who is responsible, who guides one to do and not to do. This is the ultimate truth, but it may not be realized when one has youth, lots of money and many friends. When a person is educated, wealthy and happy, he seems powerful. He can purchase anything and do anything, so he does not care for the reality. However, when a person who has everything begins to question, “Am I the master of my karma, my circumstances and myself?” he realizes that he is not the master of himself.

No one can control the respiratory system, circulatory system, digestive system, nervous system, muscular system, excretory system or the mind. If that is the case, how can one think of being in control of one’s karma? One does not even know what happens to the food in one’s stomach, how the faeces are formed or how one thinks. Thinking is a process that is going on within. Who is doing it? No one can explain what understanding is or how it happens. One is not the master of any situation, even of one’s own body.

First of all one has to discover who the master of the body, the mind, perception and recognition is. Who is the

master of life? How was one born? A person is formed in the womb in exactly two hundred and seventy days. For nine months one lives in the mother's womb as the foetus, then one is born, grows and dies. The same is true for all creatures: cows, donkeys, snakes and chickens. No one made this law, nor did the father, mother, grandfather or grandmother. Therefore, the controller of the situation, the *sutradhara*, must be known. When a seeker sets out to find the *sutradhara*, only one word appears, 'God', who may be called Rama or Govinda. These names were given to Him, although in reality He has no name.

Why does a sadhaka feel that he is the doer in the practice of karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: When the sadhaka who is practising karma yoga feels that he is the doer or that he knows everything, *ashanti*, restlessness, is revived again. One should not feel that one is doing a lot of karma yoga. That feeling of doership should be absolutely absent. One should have the feeling of being a participant, whereby one becomes free from the notion of doership. Actually, when a person thinks he is doing karma yoga, he is not, because in thinking about it there is concern for the little self. One who thinks that he is doing karma yoga is automatically operating from the ego level of individual existence and distinction, which is not karma yoga in the highest sense.

A person who is really practising karma yoga is so absorbed in doing the work while simultaneously being a witness that he does not exist in a self-conscious sense. A person practising karma yoga is not really doing anything. His mind and body work, but he does not. The actions happen through him. Rishi Vasishtha tells Sri Rama, "You should be like a wise man who manages himself as a mechanical figure or puppet. He never moves on his own, but moves only as he is moved. Rama, you should have no impulse of desire within you, just sit as quietly as a doll without mobility."

What is your personal experience of God being the doer?

Swami Satyananda: I have not chosen a mission of my own. I have been given a duty by my guru, who had his own realization. He found that I was an efficient channel for the fulfilment of his awareness and knowledge. I exist as an instrument or a tool. I don't do much thinking or planning myself. I have never led a life of ambition. As situations arise, I attend to them and participate. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, that the doer is someone else; we are only the instrument.

This verse has greatly impressed me and charted my life. For many years I was confused about action and reaction, and my involvement and role. When I read that particular statement in the *Bhagavad Gita*, everything became clear to me. How can I be the doer when God Almighty is the doer? The ego melted. I realized that whatever I am is His benediction. What I am is because of Him. What I did was because of Him. What I received was because of Him. Whatever happens in the future will be according to His wish. It was only after the dissolution of this ego that the path became slightly visible.

When the ego was present, I presumed that I was the absolute doer and had to suffer the consequences accordingly. If one is the doer, one has to be accountable for what one does, the good as well as the bad. This is not a one-day affair or a one-day game. It was fortuitous that this realization came to me, as it generally comes to those who have been unsuccessful in life. I am a person who has had one success after another. Just as one climbs the next step after placing the foot on the first step, so I continued to conquer the next step after every success. I kept on climbing higher and higher with total ease and comfort. I never faced hardships, and every project I touched was successful.

For a person like me, who has always been successful without much endeavour, to develop an inflated ego would not have been surprising. Yet every time I was successful

in life, I disowned my connection. I kept detaching myself from those areas of life in which I was successful. This success did not happen due to me. All over the world, I changed people's names; shaved their heads, and started an entire tradition, which was an impossible task. It was His will; I simply carried it out. Therefore, there was no protest.

There were so many events in my life when I thought I was the doer, the main entity, and that whatever happened was because of me. Towards the fag end of my life, I have realized that God is the doer and whatever has happened in my life is all due to Him. He made me do everything.

What a fool I was! Had I known earlier that He was making me do everything, at least I would have enjoyed those years. Today all is bliss as the pursuits of my spiritual life are fulfilled and I do not require anything. I say to the Lord, "Give Your darshan to me if You so will; otherwise, I do not deserve it, for it is Your will that prevails. I am only Your servant and a servant has no choice."

I am a servant of God, I am not the doer. He is the doer, the supreme power, the Lord of divine faculties. He selects someone to be his servant, someone to be his son, someone to be his counsellor or his exponent. He has chosen me as his servant, and my spiritual journey has come to an end. As long as I thought that I should do sadhana, my spiritual journey was incomplete. I have decided that whatever He tells me to do, I will do. I can even throw away my mala. What is there now in asana, pranayama, japa and dhyana? If He wants me to do japa, I will do it. If He tells me not to, I won't.

Why should there be ego, anxiety and neurosis in sadhana? Everyone should live in the will of God. God is first and last, and ultimately, His will comes true. A person can do nothing; he is only an instrument.

What are the results of overcoming ego and becoming the non-doer?

Swami Niranjanananda: Once the ego is eliminated, the concept, feeling or idea comes that 'I am not the doer;

God is the doer'. The same sentiment has been stated in Sanskrit: *Naham karta, Hari karta, Hari karta hi kevalam*. The meaning is simple. It is the knowledge and wisdom that no one is the thinker; someone is guiding the thoughts. No one is the actor; someone is acting through the individual. No one is the performer; someone is performing through the individual. The one who is performing is the cosmic Self, Hari. This is the knowledge of a jnani, it is the feeling of a bhakta and the life of a person who acts, a karma yogi. The same is expressed in the Bible (John 10:29–30):

My Father and I are one, but my Father is greater than me.

It is a beautiful concept that my Father and I are one; there is no distinction between the two, 'I' do not exist as an individual, as I have merged myself into the divine consciousness. In the same sentence it is also said that still my Father is greater than me, and is the one who acts. There is no sense of ego identity here. *Naham karta* – 'I am not the doer'. *Hari karta* – 'the supreme consciousness is the doer'. *Hari karta hi kevalam* – 'It is He only who performs through me'. It is a statement of total surrender of the karmas. It is saying, "Let Your will be done."

When this kind of total surrender happens on the level of karma without any identification of the ego, self, senses or expectations of gain, one experiences purity of mind, action, speech and thought. This state of purity ultimately takes one to unknown dimensions. This is the whole concept of perfection in karma yoga, as actions become pleasant. The idea of work or action is not normally pleasant, but when action becomes a joy and light, there is complete involvement and the difficulties are not felt along the way. Karma yoga is emphasized in the vedic, tantric and yogic traditions to overcome the difficulties in attitude, thought and action. According to these systems, one should not escape from life but escape into life. That is karma yoga.

What is the aim of karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Work is the tool of karma yoga; the aim is to become the perfect instrument, the perfect reflector of the cosmic consciousness in the arena of the manifested world. This is the way to perfection and higher awareness.

When an aspirant no longer considers himself to be the doer, but merely the instrument, everything he does becomes spiritualized and perfect. The actions and work become super-efficient. He becomes the expert of experts in action; the least effort produces the greatest results. Karma yoga is an important technique for growth and progress along the spiritual path. It helps to bring peace and equanimity into one's life. In itself, it leads directly to higher awareness and knowledge, even though these experiences bear little relation to the actual work being carried out. It is the inner experience that is important.

How does jnana yoga help in the understanding of karma?

Swami Satyananda: The vedic tradition speaks of three paths that an individual has to follow for personal evolution. Just as there is evolution of a society, a political system, an education system, and so on, in the same way, there is something known as personal evolution, which relates to one individual alone. It does not include even the nearest and dearest, such as husband, wife, children, mother, father, brother or sister. It is perhaps the only aspect of an individual that he can truly call his own.

The three paths of personal evolution are karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga. In each of these paths the aspirant deals with himself, but the methods are different. In the path of karma yoga, he deals with himself through the enactment of *karma*, action. In bhakti yoga, he deals through emotions, feelings and devotion. In jnana yoga, he deals with himself through *buddhi*, intellect. Dealing with himself means dealing with his mind. Throughout life, he is dealing with the mind. Life is just a play of the mind; therefore, to deal with life one has to deal with the mind, or vice versa.

Dealing with the mind implies that all dimensions of the mind have to be dealt with, from the conscious to the unconscious. In order to deal with the mind at all levels, one has to remove the *avarana*, or covering, in the form of karmas that prevent access to those deeper realms. This refinement of the mind of all extraneous material is enhanced by karma yoga or the yoga of perfection.

The refined mind perceives the reality. The process of knowledge begins as the second barrier of *avidya*, ignorance, which prevents access to the deeper realms, is slowly removed. This is accomplished through jnana yoga. If one is free from the impact of ignorance, one flows with the current of life. One understands that what is destined and inevitable by the cosmic laws of the creator has to happen and will happen, for they are events beyond anyone's control. They are events that take place due to determined laws that govern the universe, just as a judge operates within the ambit of judicial laws. Even though he may send criminals to the gallows, he remains unaffected for it is the law that decides the verdict, not the judge. A doctor may see many patients die each day, but he remains unaffected as he is aware of the laws governing the body. He knows that he cannot do anything if the time for the patient's death is close at hand.

In the same way, war, death and destruction are predetermined, they will happen, but one has to remain mentally unaffected by them. This is the central teaching of Sri Krishna to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. One of the greatest treatises on life was taught on the battlefield, amidst missiles flying in every direction. Sri Krishna did not teach Arjuna the art of living in a serene, peaceful place, a temple or an ashram. He gave the sermon and explained all the dictums when they were on the verge of one of the greatest wars in human history, the Mahabharata.

Two splendid armies were standing face to face, the war conches had been blown and Arjuna had a nervous breakdown. Arjuna was not a coward. He was one of the most accomplished warriors ever to have been born on

earth. His nervousness arose not out of fear but out of ignorance and delusion. The opposite army standing in front of him consisted of all his kith and kin, uncles, grandfathers, brothers and friends with whom he had played during his childhood. A false compassion arose in him, and he was deluded. After all, these uncles, cousins and elders had meted out injustice and committed gross acts of *adharma*, unrighteousness, towards Arjuna, his brothers, wife and mother. Arjuna himself had sworn a pledge to wage war on them and yet, when the time came for war, he had cold feet.

Of course, in today's system of war this can never happen for everything is done by remote control. Even the person who is pressing the button does not realize the consequences of his action. If he could comprehend or perceive the scene of hundreds and thousands being annihilated by the mere press of a button, he, too, would have cold feet like Arjuna. If he could imagine or visualize the hundreds and thousands of children who may become maimed, die or be orphaned, the hundreds and thousands of wives who may become widows, the old parents who may be left without anyone to take care of them, he, too, would have a nervous breakdown like Arjuna.

The question arose in Arjuna's mind because the whole scene, his family and childhood friends, was before him. He began to see it all: the weeping widows, the pining and suffering children and old parents. He questioned the rationale of this war and his mind began to doubt. However, his questioning mind was not fully convinced that the war was wrong. Had he been fully convinced, he would not have asked Sri Krishna to clarify whether he was right or wrong in going to war. He would have simply walked off the battlefield.

In the act of asking for Sri Krishna's help, Arjuna was revealing his divided mind. On the battlefield, in full view of those who were poised for war, Sri Krishna took Arjuna aside and explained to him the mysteries of life. Although

Arjuna was impressed, he was not fully convinced and would still not pick up his bow and arrows, which he had thrown down from the chariot. So Sri Krishna granted Arjuna divine vision, and he saw the death and destruction of those he was trying to save. He saw that he was only an instrument and that due to their misdeeds, their death, at his hands, was already ordained.

Sri Krishna told him, “You are not the doer, so why do you assume doership? It is when you assume doership that you become attached to the consequences of your actions and they leave a strong impact on you. If you perform actions, but are not attached to the consequences and your mind is not affected by them, it is your sense of dharma, or duty, which guides you and also protects you.”

Sri Krishna, who was God-incarnate, is motivating Arjuna to fight, kill and go to war. Sri Krishna deftly explains the blueprint of life, from birth to death. He speaks not only of the dharma of protecting and saving people, but also of the dharma of destroying that which has become unrighteous and evil. If there is a cancer growing in society, will one not want to destroy it, or will one sermonize about the necessity of allowing the cancer to grow because removing it could result in the death and destruction of some people?

INACTION IN ACTION

How can the concept of action and inaction be understood?

Swami Satyananda: The subject of action and inaction is commonly misunderstood and the cause of much confusion. Some people emphatically state that karma or work is the cause of bondage, and that action prevents spiritual illumination. On the other hand, it is said that karma or work is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. Some people advise one to stop work and do nothing, while others say that one should work incessantly. This confusion arises, as is usually the case, due to a limited, literal and over-intellectual understanding of the ideas and implications of karma and karma yoga. Of course,

without deep experience, this misunderstanding is bound to occur. Understanding can only come with personal experience.

Even if one does no physical work, the mind continues to work. Even refusing to work is action. The action occurs through physical restraint; yet the mind still works. While lying in bed with an illness, one is still active as the mind is still thinking. There is no such thing as total inactivity in normal states of awareness. Even while sleeping, one is acting through dreams.

Each person must always be doing something, whether physical, mental or both. The subconscious realms of the mind are a continuous hive of activity. One may think that one does nothing, perhaps in a state of drowsiness, but the deeper realms of the mind will continue to operate. One must accept that activity is a part of material life, and having accepted this, one should perform the given duties to the best of one's ability in the spirit of karma yoga. In this way, one will at least use the compulsion to act as a means to higher awareness and knowledge.

It is not necessary to renounce work or everyday life. Selfless work does not only mean welfare or social work, it means doing one's work, whether digging a road or administering a multimillion dollar building project, with intensity, detachment and awareness.

If anything is renounced, it should be attachment to the fruits of one's endeavours, without continually thinking of what one will obtain as a reward at the end of the work – pay, praise or respect. Obsessively dwelling on the fruits of actions only intensifies identification with the individual ego.

What is meant by 'inaction in action' as the ideal way to work?

Swami Sivananda: Sri Krishna explains the secret of yogic action to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:18):

*Karmanyakarma yah pashyedarmani cha karma yah;
Sa buddhimaanmanushyeshu sa yuktah kritsnakarmakrit.*

One who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men, is a yogi and performer of all actions.

Although one is not engaged in action, the mind is active with the idea of doership and egoism, so there is action in inaction. On the other hand, it is inaction in action when the idea of agency is absent and one feels that prakriti does everything, even while engaged physically in intense action. The idea of agency, the idea of 'I am the doer', is what binds one to worldliness. If this idea vanishes, action is not action at all and does not bind one to worldliness. If there is no agency and no selfish motive, action becomes inaction and one is not bound by action. This is inaction in action.

The liberated person is free from attachment and always calm and serene. Although engaged in ceaseless action, he is unaffected by the pairs of opposites, like joy and grief, success and failure. When a person regards an action as if it were for him, he has 'action-mentality'. When he treats action as God-ordained and for God, he becomes just a spectator; he has 'inaction-mentality'. If an action is done without expectation of the fruits of action, or *nishkama bhava*, as Ishwararpana, it is not action at all; it is 'inaction in action'. If a person identifies with Brahman and stands as a witness to the activities of prakriti and its effects, such as the mind, indriyas and body, he will realize 'inaction in action'.

Why is there confusion about action and inaction?

Swami Niranjanananda: An aspirant must perform action with full intensity, by becoming as egoless as his present condition and circumstances permit. Egolessness means leaving aside the idea that 'I am performing', 'I am achieving', 'I am doing'. This is also the theory of the *Bhagavad Gita* where two kinds of yoga have been explained. One is the yoga of action and the other is the yoga of inaction.

These two words seem to contradict one another. How can there be action and inaction at the same time? Action and

inaction are related to one's attitude. For example, in some schools of yoga, when people are initially exposed to spiritual ideas, it is stipulated that karma should not be performed as karma is binding, whereas in other schools it is stipulated that through karma it is possible to attain *mukti*, liberation. A person who has no concept of karma becomes confused by this difference. On the one hand, he is being told not to perform any action, in order to become free or to come closer to the state of realization. On the other hand, if he has to perform actions day in and day out, again the thought arises, "How can I attain realization by performing actions?" This confusion arises due to lack of spiritual education.

At no time in life can it be said that a person is inactive. One may be inactive externally, but internally one is certainly active. It is not possible to be inactive in mind, to be thoughtless, emotionless and desireless, even in the state of realization. Even God, who is supposed to be a combination of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, is not actionless, thoughtless, emotionless or desireless.

What is 'action in inaction' and 'inaction in action'?

Swami Satyananda: Arjuna was the commander-in-chief of an army and Sri Krishna was driving his chariot. Arjuna refused to fight, as the people on the opposing side were his own kith and kin. A dialogue took place in which Sri Krishna asked Arjuna, "Why don't you want to work?" Arjuna replied, "Because by working I earn karma, and by karma I am bound to one incarnation after another." Sri Krishna said, "No, you do not understand what karma is, what action is and what inaction is." He continued in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:16–17):

*Kim karma kimakarmeti kavayo'pyatra mohitaah;
Tatte karma pravakshyaami yajjnaatvaa mokshyase'shubhaat.*

*Karmano hyapi boddhavyam boddhavyam cha vikarmanah;
Akarmanashcha boddhavyam gahanaa karmano gatih.*

What is action and what is inaction? Even the wise are confused about this. Therefore, I shall teach you such action that will liberate you from the evil of birth and death. (16)

For, verily the true nature of action should be known, also that of forbidden or unlawful action, and of inaction; hard to understand is the nature of action. (17)

Sri Krishna says there are two ways of participating in life: firstly, as a part of it and secondly, as an actor. He explains that it is possible to be without karma even though one is doing something, by developing the quality of non-identification or detachment.

What are the qualities of one who embodies inaction in action?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:20–24) Sri Krishna describes the qualities of one who embodies inaction in action as:

*Tyaktvaa karmaphalaasangam nityatripto niraashrayah;
Karmanyabhipravritto'pi naiva kinchitkaroti sah.*

*Niraasheeryatachittatmaa tyaktasarvaparigraha;
Shaareeram kevalam karma kurvannaapnoti kilbisham.*

*Yadrichchhaalaabhasantushto dvandvaateeto vimatsarah;
Samah siddhaavasiddhau cha kritvaapi na nibadhyate.*

*Gatasangasya muktasya jnaanaavasthitachetasah;
Yajnaayaacharatah karma samagram pravileeyate.*

*Brahmaarpanam brahma havirbrahmaagnau brahmanaa hutam;
Brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamaadhinaa.*

Having abandoned attachment to the fruit of action, always content, nowhere seeking refuge, depending on nothing, he is not doing anything, although engaged in activity. (20)

Not hoping for anything and with the mind self-controlled, having abandoned all greed, performing action by the body alone, he incurs no sin. (21)

Content with what comes to him without effort, free from the pairs of opposites, without envy, balanced in success and failure, although acting, he is not bound. (22)

Actions melt away in one who is devoid of attachment, who is harmonious, whose mind is controlled by wisdom and who works for the sake of sacrifice. (23)

Brahman is the oblation, Brahman is the clarified butter (ghee), by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman. Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action. (24)

How can the concept of ‘action’ and ‘inaction’ be understood?

Swami Niranjanananda: Action means being the participant and inaction means knowing that one is not the doer. According to the philosophy of karma yoga, inaction does not mean becoming blind, negating or turning away from action. Inaction means that one becomes the witness of one’s actions and realizes that one is not the doer or the enjoyer. The emphasis is not on inaction, but on becoming the witness of the activity with the realization that ‘I am not the doer’.

Generally, people think action means activity and inaction means non-activity. This general concept is wrong. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:4), Sri Krishna says:

*Na karmanaamanaarambhaannaishkarmyam purusho’shnute;
Na cha sannyasanaadeva siddhim samadhigachchhati.*

Not by the non-performance of action does man reach actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation does he attain perfection.

Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that action and inaction are two sides of the same coin, but there is really no such thing

as inaction. While sitting silently, one is making an effort to sit silently. While enjoying nature, the perceptions are actively appreciating the beauty. It can't be said that one is not doing anything, because the senses and mind are actively involved. Even in a state of depression one is still active. The thoughts are active and there is awareness of the process taking place in the mind. Although one may sit quietly in a corner of the room without moving or doing anything, the body is still doing its karma. Even while asleep, there is karma. Sleep is an action performed by the body and by the person.

The body performs its karma: the heart beats, the digestive, metabolic and respiratory processes go on continuously. Those actions are always happening; there is no inactivity. If one thinks of karma as activity and inactivity, everything is active in this world. The entire world is karma, and people are individual units of karma. This karma is continuously guiding and directing everyone's body, mind and life. Therefore, life is nothing but continuous karma. The underlying, connecting thread is the sadhana, the motivation to act.

Karma arises through the association of the mind with what is happening. This association gives birth to certain expectations of outcome and there is attachment to the result. Generally, one associates karma with the activities that one does with the body, senses, mind and emotions and so one thinks that if the body and senses are not being used, one is inactive. However, in karma yoga inaction in action means detachment from the effects or the results of the karmas.

If depression or elation are not allowed to manifest according to the results of action, but one continues to act with the attitude of 'Let Your will be done', then that is called inaction in action for there is no attachment to the result. One becomes free from the effects of depression and elation. One who sees action in inaction and inaction in action is a yogi. Such a person is able to manage and separate himself from the results of action and has found peace.

The belief and experience of those who have attained higher awareness is that by removing the identity of 'I' through karma yoga, it is possible to be inactive: I, the body and mind, as an individual, am not the performer or the doer. I am not the enjoyer of the karma or the results of the actions. I am simply an actor. An actor goes on stage and plays his role from beginning to end. While playing the role, he is still a different individual, despite his identification with the part. On stage he may be acting in a Shakespearean play with the attitude and awareness of an actor, but the awareness that he is still John Smith is always there.

The notion of 'I' loses its grip over the personality when a person is fully active in the world, without being the active agent. When he realizes that his real nature is not active externally but aware and observant, his actions are no longer motivated by the idea that 'I am performing an action' and they become selfless. Not inaction but action is part of destiny.

Why is not doing any physical action still regarded as action?

Swami Sivananda: People generally think that action means movement of the body and inaction means absence of movement. However, a person who sits quietly, thinking of actions and of himself as their doer is doing actions. This is referred to as action in inaction. It is the idea of agency, 'I am the doer', that binds one to worldliness.

Adi Shankaracharya writes, "Action is commonly supposed by all to pertain to the Self, but it does not really belong to the Self, just as motion does not really pertain to the trees on the shore of the river which appear to a person on board the ship to move in the opposite direction."

What does it mean to be without action?

Swami Sivananda: Simply sitting quietly cannot make a person actionless, *naishkarmya*. He will have a thousand and one thoughts in his mind. The mind must become perfectly quiet. One must be absolutely thoughtless in order to gain

freedom from action. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* that a person who sits quietly by merely controlling the organs of action through the practice of hatha yoga, yet with his mind constantly dwelling on the objects of the senses, is no doubt a perfect hypocrite. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna extols a person as worthy who performs the yoga of action, with the organs of action, without attachment, controlling the senses by the mind (3:6–7):

*Karmendriyaani samyamya ya aaste manasaa smaran;
Indriyaarthaanvimumoodhaatmaa mithyaachaarah sa uchyate.*

*Yastvindriyaani manasaa niyamyaarabhate'ryuna;
Karmendriyaih karmayogamasaktah sa vishishyate.*

He who restrains the organs of action and sits thinking of the sense objects in the mind; he, of deluded understanding, is called a hypocrite. (6)

But whosoever, controlling the senses by the mind, O Arjuna, engages himself in karma yoga with the organs of action, without attachment, he excels! (7)

What lesson can be learnt from the lotus?

Swami Satyananda: Two theories are clearly laid down: one is the theory of action in inaction and the other is the theory of inaction in action. While acting, one can still be indifferent, be out of it and remain untainted by the blocks of karma. At the same time, if one is not involved in karma or action, not involved in life, one can still remain affected. The philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* is relevant because it teaches total involvement in action with a spirit of inaction. A person's mind and body work, but he does not. He is inactive amongst continuous activity. This is action in inaction and inaction in action, the meaning of which can only be understood through personal experience. It is the message of the *Bhagavad Gita*. One should work and at the same time not work. One should remain in the world like a lotus, which lives in water yet blossoms above it.

3

The Ego

WHAT IS EGO

Why does yoga aim to remove the ego?

Swami Sivananda: The great enemy of an individual is the ego, the sense of 'I', with its countless ramifications. Everything that holds one down in ignorance and to the cycle of births and deaths, *samsara*, is nothing but one of the many forms of the root cause, *ahamkara*, ego. The primary purpose of all branches of yoga is to remove the ego. The person who renounces the ego lives in the world like a lotus in water.

What is the role of karma yoga in regard to the ego?

Swami Satyananda: It is important to understand how much the ego stunts one's experience of existence and one's nature. People seem to expect that the loss of ego results in lethargy and laziness, but, in fact, egolessness can lead to exactly the opposite: ceaseless and tireless energy and activity. One becomes super-efficient in every action and work undertaken. Reduction of ego leads to spontaneous, intense and continuous action which is most appropriate in each situation.

The essence of karma yoga is unselfishness; egoless or selfless work. Until one lives in a state of meditation, there must always be an element of selfishness in one's actions.

When the sense of ego is lost, even for a short period of time, one is automatically in a state of higher awareness. Until this point, however, one must only do one's best to practise karma yoga – nothing more. The aspirant does the work and makes decisions to suit the situations as they arise and as they really are. He acts in the way that is best for the given circumstances, instead of working and acting only to suit his personal motives and desires. This helps to reduce the power of the ego.

Other forms of yoga help to reduce the grip of the ego, whether bhakti, raja, kriya or any other yoga. They all aim at reducing the total and overwhelming identification with the individual mind and body, even if it is only for a short period of time. These short periods of intense awareness and lessened ego states can carry over into everyday life. The purpose of karma yoga is to bring about a reduction of ego or egoless states continuously throughout the whole day and night.

What analogy can help in understanding the role of the ego?

Swami Satyananda: There must always be an ego in operation. It is an indispensable part of the mind-body complex; it is that part of each individual which coordinates the physical and mental functions of the human organism. Without the ego, the mind-body would become totally chaotic; each organ and function within the organism would go its own way. The ego is absolutely necessary for synchronized functioning and harmony within the mind and body as a whole. The ego in itself is not bad; it is the individual's over-identification with the ego that causes the problems.

Saying that the ego must be reduced really means that the influence of the ego on the external expression or internal attitude of an individual as a whole must be reduced. The ego should be allowed to perform its duties of maintaining order within the human organism, yet, at the

same time, the actions and expressions of the individual in the world should be as selfless as possible. Actions should not be done for selfish reasons, they should be done because the entire situation and surrounding, of which the mind and body are a part, warrants it.

The best way to illustrate this point is by giving an analogy: The human body is composed of many different cells, each of which performs a definite and fixed function. In a sense, each cell of the heart has an independent existence in its own right. They have an ego. If each cell began to function independently and not for the overall good of the heart, if each cell refused to do its duty, the results would be disastrous. The heart would no longer be able to function as a whole, coordinated unit. The heart would reduce in efficiency or even break down completely. In fact, this is exactly what happens in the case of cancer, where the individual cells go their own way. The organ, in this analogy the heart, made up of multitudinous cells, ceases to act as an integrated whole. In a sense, the cells obey their own egos, and no longer dedicate or sacrifice their duties to the best possible operation and advantage of the organ of which they are a part.

Instead of an individual cell, one may consider an individual human being. Each human has an ego so that the mental-physical organism maintains an identity, a reasonably fixed pattern and shape. This ego is similar to the coercive ego force within each cell, which holds and moulds the different atoms and molecules together; so that the cells keep an individual identity while simultaneously being a part of the heart. Ideally each human should sacrifice himself for the good of the overall whole, in the same way that the cell sacrifices itself for the overall advantage and harmony of the whole organism. When the individual expresses himself in the outside world, the aim is to act in the way that is most conducive to harmony in the inner world and the world around, of which he is a contributing part. When a cell acts in a selfish manner, disorder occurs in the organ and

disease results. When humans act egotistically, they produce disorder in the world and within themselves. Each ego-centred act contributes to a disease called 'world cancer'. This contribution may be small from an individual point of view, but the sum total of numerous individual selfish actions is disharmony on a world scale.

There is another factor. By not acting for the overall good of the heart or any other organ, the cancerous cell brings about its own downfall. Its ego-centred action results in failure and eventual destruction of the organ and in turn to disintegration of the cell's own material existence. It is the same with humans. Self-centred acts tend to bring about destruction of the individual, physically and mentally. By acting in accordance with the need, the dictates of the whole, the individual treads on the path to higher awareness. Moreover, every selfless and harmonious act also helps other people to tread the same path, even if they don't know it consciously. The more selfless a person becomes, the more he and others will gain in an overall and individual sense. This is a paradox, but nevertheless a great truth. The analogy of the heart is perhaps a little crude, but it does clearly illustrate the desirability of egoless actions and the undesirability of ego-centred acts.

What are the main expressions of ego?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are four ego expressions. The ego is connected and subject to the meanderings of avidya, abhinivesha, maya and asmita. *Avidya* means ignorance, and one of the actions of the ego is to suppress knowledge. With knowledge suppressed, *jnana*, wisdom, does not manifest; rather, *ajnana*, or absence of knowledge, becomes the state of life. People who are arrogant and egoistic have closed the doors of their learning. They are not willing to open these doors to understand or appreciate any other reality beyond their conditioned perception. Avidya influences the ego behaviour and ego perception. There is no light or luminosity in the state of avidya, everything is obscure.

The ego is guided by and identifies with *maya*, illusion. The ego is influenced by *abhinivesha*, insecurity and fear of losing the hold on oneself, the fear of letting go, of dying. The ego is guided by and is responsible for *asmita*, the knowledge that 'I exist', 'I am'. The ego manifests in order to guard this knowledge of 'I am'. If someone utters a few nasty words, one's sense of identity is hurt. The conflicts that take place, whether in the context of family, society or the world, are credited to *asmita*. The expressions of ego exist as inherent parts of the ego principle. They have no hold or power when one is connected with the source, but become a powerful force when one connects with the world, with the sense objects, with *prakriti*.

What is ego?

Swami Satyananda: In yogic terminology the ego is called *ahamkara*, which means the notion of 'I'. The ego and the notion of 'I' are synonymous. *Ahamkara* is the feeling of 'I-ness' which a person feels throughout his life. When one gets up in the morning, the 'I' is there. In the night when one dreams, the 'I' is there. This 'I' has been created by the rotation or movement of thousands and thousands of experiences. 'I am, I am, I am'; the stress is always on the 'I'. When one sits for meditation, the 'I' is there. When one performs worship, the 'I' is there. Even when one goes to church and prays, the 'I' is there.

The funniest thing is that people don't know they suffer from this ego. They pray to God to remove this ego, but they are not aware of the concept of ego. People claim to have no ego and to be good. They do not see the ego. It is like defecating, but refusing to look at one's faeces because it is regarded as dirty, and flushing it away or calling the sweeper to remove it. No one has seen this ego. The scriptures and vedantic texts have described the ego in detail, but still no one tries to visualize it. No one feels it and no one understands it.

This ego is the nucleus of everyone's existence. The constant and undying notion of 'I' is the nucleus. It is

one's real personality. Ahamkara is the seed or germ of individuality. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:33:37):

*Ahambhaavo'rooro janma vrikshaanaamakshayaatmanaam;
Mamedamiti visteernaasteshaam shaakhaah sahasrashah.*

Egoism is the sprout of the tree of everyone's life. In the interminable revolutions through the world, the sense of I, 'me and mine' is the cause that expands the tree into a thousand branches.

How does the ego manifest?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Manas*, the finite sequential mind, *buddhi*, intelligence, and *chitta*, impressions, memories and samskaras, are the areas where karmas are created, but they manifest with the help of *ahamkara*, ego. Ahamkara is self-identity and gives birth to karmas. In life, it is the ego which plays a crucial role due to likes and dislikes created within. It awakens the need and ambition, the drive and motivation within, resulting in either acceptance or rejection of a situation.

In the full sequence of karma yoga, a spiritual aspirant has to work with the ego. The primary work has to happen with the ego, as it is from there that karmas manifest. If a lecturer believes that he is speaking well, the ego will naturally be happy. Even at this level of communication the ego is involved. The responses to life situations are guided by ego. If a person is told to do something, immediately a thought comes, "Why me? Why am I targeted? This is not meant to be done by me." Self-perception is called self-esteem, which is nothing but an expression of the ego. People with high self-esteem have bigger egos and those with low self-esteem are connecting with the negative, lower ego.

Confrontation with the ego is encountered when one is involved in karma yoga at the physical level. If a visitor to the ashram is given a broom and told to sweep the path, he will not like it, but say, "I have been asked to sweep, I have been asked to clean! They don't know who I am! I have many

servants at my beck and call, chauffeurs, cars, and these people are telling me to sweep the path.” This reaction is coming from the ego.

What are the negative manifestations of ego?

Swami Sivananda: The ego is the self-asserting principle of the individual soul, which gives a person a sense of distinction, separation and differentiation. It puts up a barrier between him and others. The ego has created the idea of separateness from God. It is the veiling power of maya, which keeps one in ignorance. The ego identifies itself with the body, mind and senses. Wherever one finds the play of egoism, there is mine-ness, selfishness, likes and dislikes, passion, anger, greed, hypocrisy, pride, jealousy, delusion, impertinence, craving, clinging to objects, attachment to name and form, the idea of agency or ‘doership’ and ‘enjoyership’. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (16:13), Sri Krishna explains how the ego influences the mind and makes a person think:

*Idamadya mayaa labdhamimam praapsye manoratham;
Idamasteedamapi me bhavishyati punardhanam.*

This has been gained by me today; this desire I shall obtain; this is mine and this wealth too shall be mine in the future.

Egoism assumes various subtle forms. Gross egoism is not as dangerous as the subtle forms of egoism. Institutional egoism is a subtle form of attachment. One identifies oneself with the institution and becomes associated with the institution, cult or creed. One forsakes broadmindedness and mental clarity. The working of ego is mysterious, and it is difficult to detect its ways. A subtle and sharp intellect is needed to find out its operation. If one practises introspection daily in silence, one will be able to find out the mysterious ways of its working. The ego likes its own birthplace and province, the people of the province, its mother tongue, its relations and

friends, its ways of eating, mode of dressing, and so on. It has its predilections and preferences. It likes to associate its name and form with the work done, even though its nature is spiritual.

The ego wants to exercise power and influence over others. It wants titles, prestige, status, respect, prosperity, house, wife and children. It wants self-aggrandizement. It wishes to dominate and rule over others. If anybody points out the ego's defects, its vanity feels offended. Whenever it is praised, it becomes elated. The ego says, "I know everything; he does not know anything. What I say is quite correct; what he says is incorrect. He is inferior to me; I am superior to him." The ego always tries to force others to follow its ways and views. Egoism, *ahamkara*, the self-arrogating principle, the effect or modification of ignorance, is the source of the defects and perversities in human nature and of negative actions. Egoism asserts itself at every step and second.

Are there different types of ego?

Swami Niranjanananda: Ego is only personal identity. It is an assertive state of life in relation to the existence of the body; it is related to one's social behaviour and mentality. Enlightened beings like Saint Augustine in Christianity or Ramana Maharshi and Buddha in India have egos, but not the arrogant ego. Their ego is the humble ego, which only keeps them connected to their body. In normal situations, due to success and failure, people's ego becomes different. It matures and grows big quickly.

Why is it necessary to renounce the ego and practise karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Internal action and external action are the two points of action. External actions do not bind. A person may work with the family or in an office, have a shop, drive a taxi, run an industry, or do anything as an external action, and it will not bind him. The principle teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Yoga Vasishtha* is that external actions

in themselves do not bind a person, but when the ego is involved, one is bound. Where the ego is involved, karma is generated. When the personal ego is involved in the performance of duties, it acquires karma or samskara, which is again responsible for rebirth. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:17):

*Yasya naahankrito bhaavo buddhiryasya na lipyate;
Hatvaapi sa imaamllokaanna hanti na nibadhyate.*

He who is ever free from the egoistic notion, whose intelligence is not tainted, though he slays these people, he slays not, nor is he bound by the action.

A person has a mind which thinks, an intellect which makes judgements, a subconscious mind which remembers things and makes him aware of himself, and an ego which makes him feel love or hate, happy or sad. If a person is bold, it is due to ego; if he feels inferior, that is also ego. A person may be suffering from delusions of grandeur, and that is also his ego. Behaviour and feelings are related to the ego. Therefore, the relationship between the ego and the circumstances of life is responsible for pain and suffering.

If a person can detach the ego from the situations of life, there will be no suffering. Karma yoga is performing action where the ego is not involved. One works through the mind and senses without involving the ego. When there is no involvement of ego, the mental reactions are different. That is true in relation to health and every situation in life: people, business, relatives, lovers and friends. The interactions are just ego involvement. The wise person should continue to work and carry out his obligations and duties without neglecting what is expected of him. One must perform the work one is expected to do, the duties one has agreed to perform, but with one difference: one does not identify the ego with the situations. Rather one says, "I am only an instrument, an agent; I am not the doer." This is the spirit of karma yoga.

Disidentification of the ego from experiences is important in the life of a householder. As a householder one undergoes various types of experiences such as happiness, unhappiness, success, failure, joy, sorrow, praise, insult, harassment, gain, loss, frustration and disappointment. These experiences are disturbing and sometimes put a person so completely out of order that he is unable to carry on. A nervous breakdown occurs and as a result mistakes are made. A person may commit suicide, kill somebody, or escape from life. The experiences arising from the events of life dislocate the personality. Sometimes they disintegrate the personality completely and the individual is broken into pieces. However, if one is able to disidentify, to separate the experience from the ego, difficult situations may happen, as life is a mixture of all experiences, but they will have no effect.

The instructions in the *Bhagavad Gita* are considered to be the basis of karma yoga. One theme runs throughout the eighteen chapters: renounce the ego but still live in the world.

What are some of the methods for dealing with the ego?

Swami Niranjanananda: The expression of the ego takes place in the mind, and to fight with the ego is like fighting an elephant. It only ends up being hurt. It is said that one should kill the ego, but that is not possible as long as one exists in this body and is drawn to sense enjoyment. It is the ego that ties one down to karma. A person has tied himself down and wants to be free. First he must free himself of the ego-eccentricities and then he will be free of suffering, troubles and delusion, *maya*.

The ego is like a dog's tail, which can never be straightened. The only way out is to cut it off in one sweep. The sword that can quieten the ego is humility. Once an aspirant adopts humility in his life the ego will become quiet, and he will save himself from big trouble. He will not be able to save himself by practising meditation. Through

meditation he can become the witness of the ego, see its nature and cause, but he cannot modify it. To modify the ego, it is necessary to adopt humility.

If a person is being abused, he need not accept the abuse. Lord Buddha said to the man who abused him, "I am returning your gift to you." One can retreat gracefully and the mind will remain peaceful, without being affected. If one enters a fight to prove one's might, there will be hurt and pain. However, one needs to know when to advance and when to retreat; and an aspirant should have that much discriminative power.

How does a person know the best actions to suit any given situation?

Swami Satyananda: This can only be achieved gradually by practising yoga and increasing one's awareness. At first it is difficult, in fact impossible. Eventually, however, it becomes easier and easier, and one spontaneously performs perfect, egoless actions. When trying to do karma yoga, one should merely aim to practise to the best of one's ability. The most appropriate action and decision for a situation requires an awareness of all factors involved. It needs detachment, understanding and desirelessness. Most people have so many preferences, personal desires and mental problems that they can only see a limited portion of any situation. Due to lack of harmony, the mental apparatus causes inadequate and unsuitable responses.

The actions of most people are rarely appropriate for the given circumstances. Especially as a disinterested onlooker of other people, one may have seen obvious cases, where lack of direct involvement makes it possible to take a more comprehensive and balanced view of the problem at hand. The people involved have been ruled by their greed, passions, or status, intent on obtaining for themselves as much out of a situation as possible. As a result, their final actions and decisions were not the best. As a spectator one could see clearly how ego-centred the actions were. On the

other hand, egoless action brings the best possible results in a particular situation; it is perfectly suitable for the factors involved. This is the spontaneous by-product of meditation, but in the beginning most people must try their best to act without the ego.

It is worth pointing out, however, that even perfect actions with awareness can still cause harm to other people or the surroundings. Great saints, who epitomize total egolessness, sometimes cause harm to others, but they do not do it for egotistical motives. This is the difference. They have either performed an act while in meditation that was the best possible one, and some people were hurt as a by-product, or they have deliberately hurt another person, without the slightest ego motive, but for the good of the other person, to wake him up to higher experiences or to remove mental blocks.

Physical destruction is actually part of life; it is continually happening everywhere. The lion hunts a herd of zebra; no ego is involved. The zebra that is caught is merely the one that was not quick enough to escape. The lion must eat and a zebra has to provide the food. This is an example of a perfect, egoless action. The lion looks at the herd of zebra and chooses the zebra that is most vulnerable. The lion sees the situation as it is and acts accordingly. The action is not clouded by dislike for one particular zebra, or by hatred of zebra as a whole. The act is made because the circumstances demand it.

Here is another example: The body is continually throwing out dead cells, which is absolutely necessary for the health of the body. The best possible action is made to maintain the health of the body. A cell is not thrown out due to enmity between it and the human ego, or because the cell is not as pretty as the neighbouring cell. The cell is discarded because it becomes superfluous. The cell is sacrificed because it is necessary in view of the overall condition of the body. In a sense, it is perfect egoless activity. Human actions become perfect if there is no personal ego-centred motive involved.

Some harm may be done, but the actions themselves will be warranted by the situation.

Perfect egoless actions occur while in states of meditation, done spontaneously for the advantage of all, and not for limited personal gain. However, this is the ideal, and at present one must only do one's best. In fact, it is difficult to consciously reduce egotistical action, for most people are completely habituated to and enveloped by the feeling of individuality. Therefore, the influence of the ego must predominate.

By practising the various branches of yoga, including karma yoga, one tries to be aware throughout the day. In time the power of the ego will automatically drop away. One spontaneously begins to perform selfless acts due to the experience and knowledge of the deeper aspects of existence and one's relationship with other people.

It is the ego that taints and diminishes the experience of life, keeps a person blind to the environment and prevents the ascent into higher awareness. The whole point of karma yoga is to reduce and eventually eliminate the conditioned ego drives and actions.

What is the antidote to the ego?

Swami Satyananda: The best way to eradicate the ego is to develop humility. There are many acts of humility and if one can practise even the easiest ones, in the course of time humility will become part of one's nature. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu used to say that there are four qualities to destroy egoism: Be as humble as a blade of grass and as tolerant as a giant tree. Give respect to those of no respect, and remember the name of Hari or God at all times.

Egoism can be gradually obliterated, but it is difficult. It is a virus and more dangerous than cancer. It is said that when identification with the body melts and the inner self is revealed, at that time, the ego falls away. Just as a snake's scales are shed at the proper time, in the same way, the ego cannot be removed prematurely.

How can the ego be quietened?

Swami Niranjanananda: The ego can be quietened with humility. Humility is not a weakness, but a powerful force. Only a force that is stronger than the ego can quieten it. Humility is a power that can free one of the results of the karmas committed due to the ego. Ego is a negative force, and therefore the counterforce has to be positive and of greater strength. That force or quality is humility. The ego raises the head; in humility one bends the head.

EGODECTOMY

Why is it necessary to remove the ego from daily life?

Swami Satyananda: For day-to-day life, the ego is a great obstacle. Problems arise when the ego operates. There are always differences when the purpose of personal interaction is motivated by ego and not by devotion, or *bhakti*. Many minds pulling in different directions blow a fuse. The ego is the source of calamities, anxieties and desires; therefore, no enemy is stronger than ego. This I, or *ahamkara*, is the root cause of problems in the mental and psychic fields. In *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:27:21) it is said:

*Ayam so'ham mamedam tadityaakalpitakalpanah;
Aapadaam paatrataameti payasaamiva saagarah.*

The knowledge that this is I and these are mine, and all others are separate or apart is the bane of human life; one with such thoughts becomes the receptacle of evils like the sea of salty waters.

The ego is dangerous in life, not only at the individual level, but at the social and national levels as well. The whole world is in a deep crisis on account of this ego. Kingdoms are breaking down, homes are falling apart and couples who have sworn to love each other quarrel publicly due to the powerful ego. The sages have declared that the feeling of self is a personality aberration. The ego is an obstacle between

husband and wife. The accidents that take place in family life are due not only to circumstances, but to the unbending ego.

A man and woman live together and try to set aside their egos for some time. There is so much infatuation, passion, amour, but the ego is still there; it is only set aside. After some time, when the passion becomes stale, the ego comes up again, and the couple begins to notice the differences. These differences were there before, but unnoticed as the ego was sleeping somewhere. This is how misunderstandings begin to take place in family life. It is not possible to be perfect in life. There will be cordiality, understanding and love only as long as there is no ego. Love and ego cannot coexist. Where there is ego, there is definitely no love.

There is a process of giving, giving and giving, until one gives oneself completely, and there is no ego left. It is necessary to change the quality of the mind. The ego must be extricated and eliminated. When one goes on an ego-trip, one should have an egodectomy, just as one has a tonsillectomy or a hysterectomy. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:71):

*Vihaaya kaamaanyah sarvaanpumaamshcharati nihsprihah;
Nirmamo nirahankaarah sa shaantimadhigachchhati.*

The man who abandons all desires attains peace, and moves about without longing, without the sense of mine, and without egoism.

Therefore, for a householder it is important to create a true philosophy within, a true approach, a true understanding of oneself in relation to humankind. Finally, one realizes that this 'I' is a mythological 'I', not the real 'I'. If one knows that the mind, aspirations and everything in life is illuminated with divine light, effulgence and realization, everything goes smoothly. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:31:7-8):

*Ahankaaramato raama maarjayaantah prayatnatah;
Aham na kinchideveti bhaavayitvaa sukhee bhava.*

*Ahankaaraambudachchhannam paramaarthendumandalam;
Rasaayanamayam sheetamadrishyatvamupaagatam.*

Therefore, O Rama! Be diligent and wipe away the sense of egoism from your heart. Always try to be happy by thinking ‘I am not anything’. (7)

Selfish egotism is the root of the widespread branches of misery in the forest of the world, which bear poisonous blossoms of desire. (8)

Karma yoga is performing action where the ego is not involved. One works through the mind and senses without involving the ego. Every action can be converted into karma yoga, provided one knows how to separate the ego.

Is the ego destroyed in the process of karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga does not destroy the ego. Destruction of the ego is not necessary; rather the little ego merges in the cosmic self. Just as the little streams merge with the rivers and the big rivers merge with the ocean, in the same way, the ego merges with the higher spirit. The mundane experiences take place through the ego and one knows God through the ego. If there were no ego, one would never know that there is a God, a creator or a guru. The ego is essential for evolution. Therefore, the ego is not destroyed by the practice of yoga; it is purified.

The ego, which is known by the notion of ‘I’ or *aham*, identifies with each and everything concerning itself. A person thinks this is his body, his mind, his house, his children, his name, his religion, his nation, his father, his money, his bank, and so on. The ego develops through identification, which is why a person feels happy or miserable. When a person’s father is healthy, the son feels happy, and when the father is sick, he is upset. This is the response of the ego through identification and attachment. If there is no attachment, the ego will not respond or identify. One will feel that the business is not one’s business, the shop

is not one's shop and the property is not one's property. When the ego is not identified, whatever happens, it doesn't matter at all.

Whatever a person considers to be his is ego identification. After the practice of yoga, the ego is trained and purified. One can interact with the family without ego or with a purified ego. One can do one's duties without identification or attachment. One can supply the family with money, give them love and affection, buy them whatever they like and look after them well, but still remain totally detached. One can go to a hospital, serve the sick and help everybody, but it has to be with a higher understanding. This is what happens in karma yoga.

Karma yoga does not destroy the ego. The ego becomes a reflection of higher consciousness. Once a person is exposed to yoga, the ego goes back to its source. Here is a simple example. The sun is reflected in the water contained in a plate. How does one remove the sun? By removing the plate, that's all. There is no ego as such. One has to think about the higher spirit. When the mind merges with the higher spirit, there is no ego.

How can the ego be removed?

Swami Satyananda: The ego cannot be removed by psychoanalysis, self-analysis or repentance. People have tried, but they have failed. In countries throughout the world people are going to psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, but still the ego is destroying their family and social life. The ego has to be trained in order to solve the problem of the mind. The ego has to be reformed by the practice of yoga.

Karma yoga is action performed without ego or expectation, in the spirit of sacrifice. By serving the guru endlessly, the ego of the disciple is effaced. He does not say, "I came to the guru for self-realization, but he only makes me clean toilets! In me he has an unpaid servant." The guru creates conditions so that the disciple may purify himself. The most difficult thing in life is purification of consciousness, the *atma*

or the self. At present, one does not know what consciousness is or what one's faults are. One tries to correct one's social and mental faults, but there are faults embedded deep within the personality.

The guru, therefore, often performs an operation on the disciple, which is not tonsillectomy, but egodectomy, removal of the ego. This operation on the ego is so difficult that many disciples cannot bear it. However, if it succeeds, they reach the goal. Without lending oneself to the spirit and action of karma yoga, the ego will never spare one.

What is meant by action without involvement of the ego?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga is performing selfless action where the ego is not involved. The action is done for someone else. It is something that helps, pleases, saves or protects another person. Where the ego is not at all involved, that is a selfless action.

In this case, a person is working, but his ego, or sense of 'I', is not involved. The interest is involved, the senses are involved, the body is involved, the awareness and alertness are involved, the efficiency is involved, but the ego is not involved. In this way one can work through the mind and senses, but without involving the ego.

When the ego is involved, there is a setback. When the ego is not involved, there is never a setback. When there is attachment, one feels pain. When one is not involved – nothing! The householder has to try his best to detach his ego from his participation. He works in the office, in the kitchen, on the farm, in the ashram; he works through his mind, body, senses, intellect and emotions, but not through his ego. When there is selfishness, there can be no karma yoga.

How does the training of karma yoga reduce the role of the ego?

Swami Sivananda: Karma yoga is a practical course of vigorous 'personality overhaul', the path of selfless, humble, self-abnegating, motiveless service to all beings. It is an active

disciplined workout through the external day-to-day life and activities of the individual, where the karma yogi is trained to set himself aside and put service before his self. The karma yogi is taught to deny his personal pleasure and work for the happiness of others, and made to shed all *abhimana*, or personal vanity, arising out of circumstances incidental to his birth and environment.

“I am well-born’, ‘I am wealthy’, ‘I am handsome’, ‘I am clever’, ‘I am learned’, ‘I am accomplished’, ‘I am strong’ – in such and other ways does *abhimana* exist in the individual. To cast out such vain pride of birth, rank, wealth and learning is the task behind the *sadhana* of karma yoga. The seeker is first asked to forget his notions of superiority and to consider himself a humble servant. ‘I am nothing’, ‘I am a servant of servants’, ‘I am a humble instrument’, ‘I want no praise’, ‘I seek no gain’, ‘I know nothing’, ‘I live to learn’. With such *bhava*, or mental-cum-emotional attitude, practised persistently and actively, the karma yogi is trained to batter down the citadel of *abhimana*.

However, the idea is not sufficient. He must start to work in the spirit of karma yoga by doing the most menial manual work without the least repugnance or unwillingness. He is taught to consider work as worship, to serve all and to behold the Lord in all. He is taught to work ceaselessly for the happiness and good of all, to offer his body, mind, wealth and everything in this process. In this way, the gross egoism immersed in *tamas* and filled with unnatural pride, arrogance, selfishness, greed, shame, fear and superiority is put into the furnace of karma yoga *sadhana*. It emerges as a purified, refined, *sattwic* principle full of humility, sweet with selflessness, compassion and the spirit of worshipful service, devoid of vanity and arrogance, simple and loving.

How does the practice of karma yoga remove ego?

Swami Satyananda: By the practice of karma yoga, a person discovers that he has ego. It is difficult to discover the ego, as one considers oneself to be an incarnation of humility.

In England, for example, if people don't like a person, they will never say it. However, that doesn't mean that they are humble; they have only been trained that way. That is their culture and tradition; it is not their personality. When one interacts with different people while practising karma yoga, there is conflict and a tussle between two egos.

Karma yoga is not doing voluntary work in a hospital or giving free service. A person's obligations, duties, job and interactions with family members and friends constitute karma yoga. When one relates with family members and outsiders with a developed consciousness, taking note of each and every change that is taking place, that is karma yoga. A karma yogi does not involve himself, but keeps himself out. He is a seer of events and effects. Therefore, in one's family life, whatever one does, whichever way one lives, has to be seen in the light of karma yoga. And when a person realizes that he has a really big ego, he practises bhakti yoga.

How can one learn to act without ego?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga means performing action with meditative awareness. Even when one is involved in activities to sustain and nurture the personality, mind and emotions, those activities have to be observed. One has to see whether the actions are ego-centred or done without ego. Ninety-nine point nine percent of actions are ego-centred. This kind of action is known as *sakama karma*, actions performed with a purpose or desire which has been guided by the ego principle.

Being without ego means leaving aside the idea that 'I am performing', 'I am achieving', 'I am doing'. Initially, in order to experience action without ego, a person has to use intellectual ability to analyze the situations and experiences that he is having. Eventually, he tries to stabilize himself at one point, which is not guided by the ego. In karma yoga it is not the surface reaction that is important but the subtle reaction that has to be observed. By observing the subtle reactions, it may become possible to convert the ego-centred

actions into an expression of one's being where there is no ego. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:33:70):

*Ahankaaraanusandhaanavarjanaadeva raaghava;
Paurushena prayatnaachcha teeryate bhavasaagarah.*

By investigating the nature of ahamkara and forsaking gross selfishness, one crosses over the ocean of the world through one's own efforts.

Being without ego implies that one has to be simple, sincere and desireless. To cultivate egolessness, these three important qualities are essential: sincerity in commitment, goal and direction, simplicity in thought and action, and a state of desirelessness

What instruction did Swami Sivananda give you?

Swami Satyananda: My guru, Swami Sivananda, gave me the following instruction regarding my attitude to work. He said, "If you work with the understanding that you are not working for yourself, but that your work is offered to guru and humanity, you are not responsible for success or failure. The servant only follows the command of the master, so the success or failure of his work belongs to the master. In the same manner, if a person can develop the attitude that he is not working for his own gratification, fulfilment or satisfaction, but is offering his work for a particular purpose with a particular intention, the ego can be managed more effectively and efficiently." After having spent so many years of my life on the path of karma yoga, I see the value of that instruction, which was given to me as a young sannyasin.

Why must menial work be done as part of karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: A raw untrained aspirant feels that the preceptor is treating him like a servant and using him for petty jobs. However, a person who has understood the right significance of karma yoga will take every work as yogic activity or worship of the Lord. There is no menial work

in that person's vision; every work is worship or pooja of Narayana. All actions are sacred in the light of karma yoga. Only that aspirant will become a dynamic yogi who takes immense delight in doing work which is considered by the worldly person to be menial service. He will be absolutely free from conceit and egoism, and will have no downfall as the canker of pride cannot touch him.

Is there an example of egodectomy?

Swami Satyananda: The following incident is an illustration of egodectomy. I have always been a difficult person, even in the ashram in Rishikesh. The ashram rule was that before food was served, a swami would collect a tiffin from the kitchen and carry it to Vishwanath Mandir. There the food was offered to the deity, *bhojanam*, and pooja took place. Tulsi leaves and Ganga *jala*, water, were sprinkled on the tiffin of food before it came back to the kitchen, where it was mixed with the rest of the food. Only then would the bell go. That was the tradition and discipline of the ashram.

One day a professor came to the ashram. Swami Sivananda liked him very much because during his days as a mendicant he used to move about with Swamiji and sing kirtan and bhajan. It was about 10 am. Swami Sivananda told me, "Swami Satyananda, give him food." I said, "Swamiji, pooja is not over!" He said, "He is also God, serve him first!" I said, "So why do you make that rule? If he is God, I am also God and everybody who eats at 10 am is also God! Why did you make the rule that the food must be offered first to Lord Vishwanath, sanctified and brought back to the kitchen before anyone is served? Where is the rule today?" Swamiji was about ten or fifteen yards away from me. I took the bunch of keys and threw them at him, saying, "You look after the kitchen!"

Straight away, I went to my room and locked myself in for three or four days. I did not open the door. I was so angry, so suffocated, so frustrated. I did not know what to do! He was my guru! I could not beat him! I could not abuse him and I

could not complain to anyone! I did not know how to make peace with him. Sometimes it becomes difficult to make peace even if one wants to. Being an egoistic man, I did not come out at all for three or four days. Finally my body gave way. I went to the kitchen and quietly took a little food! The swamis were quiet and did not disturb me. When I came back, Swami Sivananda met me on the way. He said, "Om Namō Narayanaya. How are you?" I said, "I am alright." He said, "Will you have a cup of coffee?" I said, "Yes." I thought, at least it could be a point of reconciliation. Swami Sivananda never took coffee. Never! But he used to keep coffee, particularly for me. Whenever I went to him about some work he would make coffee.

He did not mention this incident at all to anybody and never admonished me by moralizing and saying, "Look here, God is in every face!" He knew that I was suffering from a disease called 'ego' and that it was difficult for him to perform an egodectomy on me. So he thought it was better to keep quiet.

It is difficult to define what surrender is and what the shape of the ego is. Does it mean that when I have a personality, views and principles and am arrogant about them, that I am not a disciple? I am also a disciple because I have accepted Swami Sivananda as my guru, not ninety-nine point nine percent but one hundred and ten percent! He is the guru and therefore he will perform the egodectomy operation on me. He does it with a good motive, not a bad motive. A sadhaka or aspirant has to be humble, not offensive. He should not be bitter or revengeful. Intellectually I understood everything, but still I could not accept it!

How can pride be overcome while helping others?

Swami Sivananda: The person who serves the world really serves himself. The person who helps others really helps himself. This is an important point. Generally, worldly-minded people are puffed up with egoism when they render

some help to others. They are filled with pride. This world does not want the help of anybody. There is one omnipotent God, *Ishwara*, who controls and guides this universe. He can immediately supply a thousand and one Tilaks, Newtons, Shakespeares, Napoleons, Valmikis and Yudhishtiras. When a person serves someone, he should think that God has given him an opportunity to improve, correct and mould himself by service. One should be grateful to that person who gave one a chance to serve.

What are the different forms of ego needing egodectomy?

Swami Niranjanananda: Egodectomy is the destruction of ahamkara. This destruction or transformation of ego relates with the manifest personality, with the subtle personality and with the individual identity. When ego is associated with the manifest personality, the body and mind, it is seeking fulfilment. With fulfilment, one of the manifestations of ego comes in the form of arrogance, the 'I am holier than thou' attitude.

When ego is associated with the subtle mind, it takes the form of what is known as self-esteem, *swabhimana*. In the gross or manifest personality, it is only *abhimana*, arrogance. In relation to the subtle personality it is swabhimana, self-esteem, confidence, optimism, belief in one's self. At the subtle mental level the guru tries to develop the swabhimana, the ability to trust oneself, the ability to listen to one's conscience, the capacity to know the appropriate and right method to achieve the goal.

In the final stage, the guru helps to overcome the remnant of the individual self or one's individuality. Loss of individuality creates a lot of fear in people as they begin to worry about what their identity will be if they do not have their ego. In spiritual life this loss of identity is seen as a gain and not a loss. It is a gain in the sense that one has overcome the limited nature of the self and connected with the cosmic self.

The egodectomy can take any form, depending on the individual. What has to be recognized is the role of the

aspirant in relation to the guru. The aspirant must strive to develop a sense of identification with the energy and spirit of the guru, and evolve to that level of close connection where although guru and disciple may live in two bodies, their spirit is one.

Why do ego and pride sometimes become greater when practising karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Many symptoms manifest during the practice of karma yoga, such as vanity, egoism, mean-mindedness and a lot of pride. At some stage one will probably say, “I am a karma yogi and the other people are wretched.” Practitioners face a lot of mental dissipation, oscillation and distraction on the path of karma yoga. These have to be known and analyzed. If they are not opposed, they will go away in the course of time. During the practice of karma yoga, self-purification takes place. Karma yoga is a process of purifying the dross of the mind, and letting the dirty things out.

The practice of karma yoga is a gradual process of self-purification. The ego is fat and it is being released. One should let it come up and not stop it, but be conscious that the ego is being expressed. Selflessness does not come all of a sudden; it is the culmination of the total process of karma yoga. The obstacles one confronts in the beginning are inevitable, but if one continues to practise karma yoga with the attitude of a detached witness, the ego will definitely fade away. One should remain conscious of the play of the ego, and it will subside in the course of time and one will become humble. The ego will no longer interfere with the practice of karma yoga.

Why is constant vigilance necessary in the practice of karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: One of the main objectives of karma yoga is the eradication of egoism. When a person does selfless service, this ego will lurk like a thief. It will induce him

to associate his little self with the work he is doing. In the long run, if he happens to slacken his vigilance, he will be filled with spiritual egoism. He will take no interest in any form of work unless his name is associated with it. He might wish to disseminate spiritual knowledge, but he will always be desirous of self-glory and will try to justify this through childish arguments. Nothing can be worse in the life of a spiritual seeker.

The aspirant must be vigilant. He has to master his ego through the constant practice of subordination and humility with wisdom. The spirit of service must enter every nerve, cell, tissue and bone of his body, and be ingrained in him. If he really wants to grow in the spiritual path, he must do service daily until the end of his life; only then will he be safe.

How can egodectomy be explained?

Swami Niranjanananda: The yogis say that managing the ego is a difficult aspect of spiritual life. A person cannot see his face without a mirror or another person describing what his face looks like. If he is told bluntly what his face looks like, he doesn't like it and the other person becomes an enemy. There is a strong reaction, as no one likes to recognize or see himself.

The yogis say that the final hurdle to cross in the process of self-realization is the ego. Therefore, in the final stage of spiritual life, the guidance and inspiration of a guru is needed. Practices can be performed at any time or anywhere. One doesn't need a guru to learn practices, but a guru becomes necessary to help overcome this last obstacle, the ego. The guru channels the ego and changes its direction. This process is called egodectomy. Not many aspirants can go through egodectomy. Therefore, gurus don't have many disciples. They may have thousands of initiates, but they have only one or two disciples on whom egodectomy can be performed successfully. Ramakrishna Paramahansa had many followers, but he performed

egodectomy on only one. Swami Sivananda had many initiates, but he performed egodectomy on only a few. Swami Satyananda had many initiates, but he performed egodectomy on only a few.

If one agrees that egodectomy needs to be performed, one has to know what it means. It means that one has to die to be born again. The old self has to die. The shell has to be broken for the seed to sprout. As long as the shell remains, the seed will never sprout. Egodectomy is the breaking of the shell.

BEYOND EGO – HAPPINESS

Why does ego have to be eliminated for spiritual realization?

Swami Sivananda: The root of spiritual realization and emancipation lies in the theory of ignorance. Ignorance is the root of bondage. Ignorance manifests in the individual soul as ahamkara, or egoism. The root of the whole problem is the ego in the individual soul. The moment the ego is removed, the Self shines forth in all its splendour. That is everyone's essential nature, *satchidananda*, truth-consciousness-bliss. A person can become one with that cosmic consciousness by melting the egoism or self-asserting principle and thereby obtaining the highest divine knowledge.

What is the importance of egolessness?

Swami Niranjanananda: Egolessness is another attribute of karma yoga. The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that one who is free from the feeling of ego, and is not swayed by the feeling of good and bad, walks the path of righteousness and righteous action. To be egoless or free from the bondage of ego takes one onto the path of righteousness, which is the sinless path. The yogic definition of sin is 'disharmony'. In yoga a disharmonious state, which takes one away from realizing one's true nature and direction and which diverts the

awareness and attention away from righteousness, is known as sin. Action performed as a duty or obligation takes one away from inharmonious expression.

At present the expression of most people in the world is not harmonious. There is no harmony in their thinking, so how can there be harmony in their actions? The motivation of selfishness, of 'I', superimposes itself on everything. The state of egolessness needs to be developed as an aid to further experience. A change in one's attitude and vision of life will help one to become egoless. Therefore, it is said that one must perform action with full intensity, by becoming as egoless as the present conditions and circumstances permit. Having no ego means leaving aside the idea that 'I am performing', 'I am achieving', and 'I am doing'.

Why does the ego have to be given up for realization?

Swami Satyananda: In philosophy there are two elements: the first is the ego and the second is the self. The self means the atma, higher spirit or supermind, the cosmic or higher self. For convenience, the terms lower empirical self and transcendental self can be used. The lower empirical self is responsible for worldly experiences. The higher self is responsible for enlightenment or higher knowledge.

The ego accompanies the personal individuality, but does not constitute the real self or true being. As long as one identifies with the body, emotions and mind, one will continue to suffer hurt and pain. Yoga helps a person to identify with the higher side of his nature, which leads to the experience of greater awareness, bliss, efficiency in action, and popularity in daily life. Yoga strips away the illusions, not the defences. Unless one loses oneself, one cannot gain oneself. In losing oneself lies the secret of total acceptance, total achievement. People do not want to lose their self and they think, "If my ego dies, what will happen to me?" Nothing will happen. People who want spiritual life have to solve this riddle of ego. First it must be solved on a day-to-day basis and later on a higher spiritual basis.

There is no ego in nirvana or in samadhi. The divine, higher or supreme vision takes place when there is no ego, not before that. Ego is an obstacle on the spiritual path between oneself and one's guru. It is the greatest obstacle between God and the devotee. What Tulsidas calls *drishti dosha*, 'defective vision', may be called a cataract. This is the ahamkara, the ego, within everyone. When a person has cataracts in the eyes, he cannot see what is in front of him. Even though the Lord is in front of a person, he fails to see Him. This blind spot is the ego.

Swami Sivananda used to say that one has to renounce the ego to attain realization. Meditation, yoga and bhakti are good, but what is their use after all? What is the benefit of bringing beautiful flowers and nice furniture into the house if one does not have the eyesight to see them? One must first remove the cataract. The ego taints and diminishes one's experience of life. It blinds one to the internal and external environment, and prevents the development of higher awareness. The highest being can only be realized once the ego is eliminated. Therefore, one has to renounce abhimana, pride, 'I am a great swami', 'I am a holy man', 'I am the son of the prime minister'. Even a debauched person, a drunkard and gambler has abhimana, which is the centre of his personality. Abhimana has to go if one wants to make oneself infinite.

Will people become inactive if there is no ego?

Swami Satyananda: When the sense of ego is lost, even for a short period of time, one is automatically in a state of higher awareness. Human actions become perfect if there is no personal, ego-centred motive involved. Most people think that loss of the ego results in lethargy and laziness. It is widely believed that only passion, financial benefits and other motives can compel people to work, and that without these inducements people would languish in a state of total inactivity. Anticipation of reward does make people work, but this kind of work leads to incessant discord in the outside

world and in the inner environment of the individual. On the other hand, a person who has clear insight and is not motivated by thoughts of personal reward will realize his duty and do it. He will follow the actions that come naturally to his body and mind, and not stop his work.

Karma yoga does not result in lethargy and lack of interest in work. In fact, being without ego can lead to exactly the opposite: ceaseless and tireless energy and activity. A karma yogi becomes super-efficient in every action and work undertaken, and works far more efficiently than if motivated by ego-centred reasons. One will be able to work with the least fuss and with the minimum clash of interests in association with other people. One can easily dodge around obstacles which tend to block or confuse other people, perhaps due to their pride or stubbornness.

Ramana Maharshi said, “When egoism ceases, actions become spontaneous.” The reduction of ego leads to spontaneous, intense and continuous action, which is most appropriate for the given situation. Egoless action brings the best possible results in a particular situation for it is perfectly suitable for the factors involved. Swami Vivekananda said, “The degree of unselfishness marks the degree of success everywhere.” This is the boon of being without ego. This is the ideal, but it is difficult to reduce egoistic action, as most people are enveloped in the feeling of individuality. However, one can move beyond the experience of I-ness, even at an early stage, by living the life of karma yoga.

What is the result of eliminating the ego through karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: The message of the *Bhagavad Gita* emerges as an assurance that one can qualify for the highest liberation in and through the performance of one’s respective duties in life, if one performs action without egoism and attachment, and surrenders the desire for selfish, personal gain. A karma yogi does self-sacrifice to kill his little self, to destroy this

little, self-arrogating ‘I’, which is the root cause of human suffering.

Absence of egoism is knowledge. Karma yoga prepares the mind for the reception of light or knowledge. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:9):

*Asaktiranabhisvanganah putradaaragrihaadishu;
Nityam cha samachittatvamishtaanishtopapattishu.*

Non-attachment, non-identification of the Self with son, wife, home and the rest, and constant even-mindedness in the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable is knowledge.

How can unity be experienced?

Swami Sivananda: Karma yoga expands the heart and breaks the barriers that stand in the way of unity or oneness. A karma yogi purifies the heart through constant selfless service. He kills egoism through self-sacrifice, attains illumination and thus achieves conquest over the self. By regarding the performance of one’s duties as worship offered to God, one obtains the grace of the Lord and attains the eternal One. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:53):

*Ahankaaram balam darpam kaamam krodham parigraham;
Vimuchya nirmamah shaanto brahmabhooayaaya kalpate.*

Having abandoned egoism, strength, arrogance, anger, desire and covetousness, free from the notion of ‘mine’ and peaceful, one is fit for becoming Brahman.

The aspirants develop universal love and brotherhood, and the barriers which are made by man for his own self-aggrandizement and self-assertion, and which create discord and disunion, are broken.

What has to be renounced?

Swami Satyananda: A person doesn’t have to renounce action. Renunciation of action does not solve the problem of the

mind. What one has to do is train and reform the ego, and in order to reform the ego, one should practise yoga. By driving away the egoism of the mind, as well as the desires from the heart, one attains perfection and experiences the fullness of perfect bliss in oneself. Until now people have been labouring under ignorance of what is to be abandoned and what is to be retained, as the sky labours under the clouds. It is not abandoning the world but abandoning the ego and the greedy desires of the mind that leads to true happiness.



4

Expectations

HOPES FOR REWARDS

How do expectations influence the mind and behaviour?

Swami Sivananda: The mind is so framed that it cannot work without expectation or anticipation of rewards. If a person smiles when he meets a friend, he expects a smile in return. If one gives a cup of water to somebody, one expects something in return. If one salutes a friend on the road, one expects a greeting in return. This is the inborn nature of worldly-minded people. A person generally plans to obtain the fruits of his work before he starts to work. The mind is so framed that it cannot think of any kind of work without remuneration or reward. This is due to the quality of rajas, which creates selfishness and attachment.

A selfish person has no large heart and no ideal. He is petty-minded and full of greed. He always calculates and cannot do any service in a magnanimous manner. He weighs work and money in a balance. He is ever watching the time for stopping his work. He is a mercenary, hired for money, and activated by the hope of reward and greedy of gain.

Selfless service is unknown to him. He has no idea of God and no glimpse of truth. He cannot imagine an expanded, selfless life. He has got into a narrow, circumscribed circle or groove, and dwells within this small groove. His love extends only to his body, wife and children. Generosity is unknown to

him. The human *swabhava*, or nature, is always like this. The nature changes slowly when discrimination, *viveka*, dawns. The spirit of selflessness slowly creeps in when the mind is filled with more *sattwa*, or purity.

What is the consequence of karma in relation to its results?

Swami Satyananda: Every action produces some type of result, whether one is running a business or a house, gardening, farming or interacting with a lover. Even no work produces a result. Every physical and mental action produces a result. While walking along the road of enjoyment, the result will be positive, negative or a combination of both. The result that one wants is a positive result and profit. What one does not want is a negative result or loss. A mixed result is what one wants and does not want. Every action, also in the realm of thought, is followed by one of these results.

In life, sometimes positive results are obtained and sometimes negative results. When one has attachments, the mind is not properly prepared to handle the results with calmness and stability. The work people do in the world is motivated by the fruits which the work will bear. Due to expectations, the mind is affected either positively or negatively. A negative result is depressing and a positive result gives elation. An individual is always experiencing emotional ups and downs, which make him more ambitious and insecure. Even when a person experiences happiness, he is unhappy because he knows that anything can happen to his happiness.

The mind is greatly influenced and frequently agitated by the negative aspect of results. This completely disturbs the balance of life. When the mind is affected by negative results, it often becomes depressed or deranged, allowing such diseases as asthma, cancer, hypertension or diabetes to manifest. At these times one may even commit suicide or divorce one's partner. Anything can happen because the karma affects the personality and behaviour. The karmas themselves do not bind a person and do not cause diabetes,

blood pressure or heart attacks. The *karmaphala asha*, or expectations of results, are the cause.

The *Bhagavad Gita* explains how work does not bring attachment or bondage. It does not stand in the way of liberation. One can work as a butcher, cobbler, washerman or housewife, and this work will not be a barrier on the path of devotion, and yoga. However, when one's expectations are included within the framework of one's action and one is unable to disengage the ego, the problem of being affected positively and negatively arises. In both cases the mind, brain, heart and physical system are influenced, and the individual suffers from physical, mental, emotional and personality problems.

The karma one does not only results in *ishtaphala*, the attainment of one's desires. There are three types of result: (i) fulfilment of desire, *ishtam*, (ii) non-fulfilment of desire, *anishtam*, and (iii) that which works for and against one, *nishritam*. Whatever karma a person is doing, he is always worried about *anishtam*. Whether one is about to marry, have a child, educate the son, send him to England, or arrange the daughter's marriage, one is always aware of *anishtam*, never of *ishtam*. That worry has an indirect effect on the body, brain and nervous system. Most of the diseases that people are suffering from are due to absence of the right philosophy.

A person with attachments has certain expectations and consequently fears, anxieties and insecurities. When one has a property or business, the thought of a thief is always lurking somewhere in the background. When one has children, a job, a political career, an institution, and so on, there is always insecurity and fear of failure. When something happens, the mind starts whirling, causing mental, emotional and physical problems. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (6:30:83):

*Svasankalpopavaataasu bheetaa sambhramadrishtishu;
Palaayate vaanyanyaasu vetaaleshviva baalikaa.*

The mind that is led by its desire is always apprehensive of disappointment; and it coils back for fear of a reverse, as a timorous girl flies afar from the sight of a spectre.

These fears are always there. Whatever action one does in life, and whatever result is obtained from it, fear always follows. This is why the human mind is always obsessed by unconscious fear, and the yogi psychologists have known this.

Fear is often lurking in the depths of the mind, even though nothing is happening on the surface. If one does not fear that something may happen, why does one go to the temple or church? Why does one propitiate this deity, that tomb or that tree? One has not analyzed oneself, the causes of fear and how to remove them.

If a person becomes a multi-millionaire, a great scholar or artist, a commander-in-chief, or a personality beyond challenge, still the results of karma are there. In the *Yoga Vasishtha*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Ramayana*, it has been amply demonstrated that mixing a person with worldly affairs gives rise to a third element known as unhappiness, tension or difficulty. When contact is made, relationships form and attachment arises. Nobody in this world does any work without some expectation of the result. This is the natural law of life and it applies to everyone living in the world.

Why do people react differently to life's situations?

Swami Satyananda: By reading the *Bhagavad Gita* one will gain a better understanding of detachment and the correct attitude towards the results of one's actions. If two people own a business, it may prosper or fail. The first person is only concerned with the business and not at all worried about the results or profits, but the second person has expectations. If the business is successful and makes a large profit, the first person will put the money in the bank. If the business meets with failure, he will simply close it down. However, for the second person, success is of vital

importance. If he makes a lot of money, he is very happy. If his business fails, high blood pressure and heart attack are likely to follow.

How do expectations trigger off more karma?

Swami Satyananda: Detachment is a living sacrifice. With detachment one works for perfection without any expectation or attachment to the fruits or results of the work. Detachment arises when a person can perform his duties to family, society and nation without any feelings of possessiveness. Detachment should be understood in its correct perspective.

A story about two brothers illustrates this point: Lalu and Kalu went to the market and bought two hundred mango tree plants. They returned to their home and planted them in their field. That night Lalu was sitting in his room thinking, “It is so good that I have planted so many mango trees. Within five years I will get hundreds of thousands of mangos. Mangos will be worth at least twenty-five rupees per kilo by then. In seven years they will be worth even more.” He went on thinking about this until one o’clock in the morning. In his mind he had already harvested the mangos, sold them, started a mango export agency, bought four trucks, and purchased State Bonds with his enormous profits. He even thought of a way to hide his money from the Income Tax Department. The night passed into morning. When he went out to have a look at the field, to his great dismay he found that during the night buffaloes had eaten and trampled on nearly all of his plants. Poor Lalu was heartbroken.

On his way home he met his son, who was going to school. “Father,” his son said, “I have to pay my fees today. Please give me ten rupees.” Lalu was in an angry mood. “You think your father is made of money!” he answered roughly and slapped his son. When he returned to his house, his wife had already prepared his bath, but he became angry with her also. “All day long you do nothing,” he shouted. “You have

not even brought me my tea yet,” and with that he started smashing the cups and glasses.

Kalu, after planting his share of mango trees, went to his room and thought, “Now I have planted many mango trees and I am tired.” As soon as he laid down on his bed he fell into a deep sleep. In the morning he, too, went out to the field and saw that the plants had been trampled and eaten. Instead of becoming distraught, he hurried home to bring his brothers and nephews to help him save the remaining mango plants. They returned to the field, salvaged what plants they could and built some protection around them.

This is the difference in attitude between a karma yogi and a person who is simply making more karma for himself. These two brothers illustrate the two types of expectation for the fruits of labour, which lead to happiness and unhappiness. They are examples of correct and incorrect attitudes towards work, and the depth of people’s imaginations, ambitions, emotions and relationships towards their work. Karma is deeply rooted within the quality of the relationship with the object, person or event. People who do not understand this are unhappy.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is like a ray of light. Each lesson shows how to be detached from the work one does. It clearly explains that detachment does not mean the sacrifice of work, but the fruits of the work. Detachment is a mental quality. Every work and action in life affects the mind, but through detachment one learns to be free of this effect.

How does the expectation of reward affect one’s karma?

Swami Sivananda: Actions done with expectation of rewards bring bondage. The fault or defect of karma is not in the action itself, but in the expectation of reward and attachment. Nature dispenses the fruits of actions according to the motive. If the motive is pure, one will obtain divine grace and purity of mind. If the motive is

impure and one expects fruit for one's actions, one will have to return to this world to reap those fruits. One will have to take birth again and continue to perform virtuous and vicious actions through the force of attraction and repulsion. One will be entrapped in the never-ending wheel of births and deaths.

The actions that are performed in an unselfish spirit, without attachment and the idea of agency, do not stand in the way of obtaining emancipation. When actions are done without the expectation of rewards, rajas and tamas are destroyed and the mind is filled with sattwa or purity. Actions done with the spirit of selflessness and with discrimination are instrumental in destroying the bonds of karma.

The harmonious person does action for the sake of the Lord, without expectation of the fruit. He says, "I do actions only for my Lord, not for personal gain or profit." He attains the peace born of devotion through the four stages: (i) purity of mind, (ii) attainment of knowledge, (iii) renunciation of actions, and (iv) steadiness in wisdom. The person who is unbalanced and without inner harmony is led by desire and is attached to the fruits of the actions. He says, "I have done such and such an action, and I will get such and such a fruit." He is firmly bound.

A nishkama karma yogi does his work without expectation of fruits. He does not thirst for rewards, has a pure heart, purity of consciousness, *chitta shuddh*, and ultimately attains illumination, knowledge of the higher self and freedom from the round of births and deaths. The karma yogi shakes off the bondage of birth. He attains knowledge of Brahman, *Brahma jnana*, and thus liberation or *moksha*, eternal bliss, peace and immortality.

According to the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:51), when one performs actions, there should be no desire for the fruits thereof under any circumstances:

*Karmajam buddhiyuktaa hi phalam tyaktvaa maneeshinah;
Janmabandhavinirmuktaah padam gachchhantyanamayam.*

The sages, united with pure reason, renounce the fruit which action yields and, liberated from the bonds of birth, they go to the place beyond all evil.

What is the cause of tragedies in the world?

Swami Satyananda: A person with a strong heart can protect himself from the vagaries of life, but if the heart is weak, he feels defeated and falls. He has many expectations in the world, and these expectations are the problem. The person who has great hopes in the world and thinks it to be a satisfying place will one day be defeated by the world. He becomes anxious, excited, unstable, perplexed and even mad. There is only one cause for the tragedies of the world – big expectations.

However, a karma yogi is a person who lives in the world and does his work, but has no expectations. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:12), Sri Krishna said:

*Yuktah karmaphalam tyaktvaa shaantimaapnoti naishthikeem
Ayuktah kaamakaarena phale sakto nibadhyate.*

The united one, having abandoned the fruit of action, attains eternal peace; the non-united, impelled only by desire and attached to the fruit, is bound.

In various chapters the *Bhagavad Gita* says that if one does not attach oneself to the experiences of life, while eating, drinking, breathing, dreaming or sleeping, one has not done any karma. The rivers go on flowing into the ocean for thousands of years, but the ocean remains unaffected. In the same way, the mind remains untainted by the actions when karma yoga is practised. Sri Krishna says (4:14):

*Na maam karmaani limpanti na me karmaphale sprihaa;
Iti maam yo'bhijaanaati karmabhirna sa badhyate.*

Actions do not taint Me, nor have I a desire for the fruits of actions. He who knows Me thus is not bound by actions.

One who does action in the world but has no expectations of the results is truly a powerful person.

How should hopes and expectations be dealt with?

Swami Niranjanananda: Exponents of karma yoga say that one should strive for the completion of an action, each action being a creative expression, done with perfection and without expectation of a result. However, the realities of life show that no one is evolved enough to deny the results, the fruits of action.

Whenever there is any action, there is a natural craving for a better outcome or result. Even though it is said not to expect results and to keep on doing one's duty, in reality everyone expects results. It is one thing for Sri Krishna to say in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:47) that one has the right to perform karma but not the right to its result. However, as a normal individual one cannot make that statement – with what authority would one say it? A human being expects results, even a spiritual aspirant expects results. If one does *japa*, one wants to have an experience; if one practises meditation, one wants *darshan*.

It is not wrong to expect results, but hankering after and being obsessed with the result is wrong. With obsession, suffering and pleasure come. When pleasure comes, an individual is attracted towards what is pleasurable. *Sukhanushayi ragah* – one is attracted to those conditions, situations and objects through which happiness and pleasure can be experienced. That is called *raga* or attraction. Alternatively, one feels aversion, *dvesha*, towards conditions which cause suffering; one does not want to suffer because one is fearful of suffering. *Dukhanushayi dweshah* – there is rejection of the conditions which cause suffering. The hankering is for the result which is pleasing because it is believed it will make one happy, but if the result is seen as displeasing, one avoids it.

Both success and failure have to be accepted. Often when there is failure one says it was the will of God and when there

is success one says it was one's own doing. This indicates a tamasic frame of mind, as the person is not willing to take responsibility for his actions. Just as day and night are accepted as natural events of life, success and failure are also natural events of living.

One may have the expectation of a benevolent, auspicious and fruitful result, but one should not hanker after it or be obsessed with it. If there is obsession, creativity and awareness are lost, and one acquires tunnel vision. Looking at the world through a pipe gives limited vision. In obsession, the mind focuses only on one thing. In depression, people think gloomily; in elation, they think only of happiness. All these states indicate tunnel vision.

When a person performs a karma, he should do it well. Whatever he has to obtain in return, he will get. If he drinks water, his thirst is bound to be quenched. It doesn't take a bucket of water, one glass will suffice. The circumstances come and go, and expectations are always there in one form or another. What needs to be handled is attachment to a result. Karmas have to be performed with awareness and without paying attention to gain and loss. Being able to balance oneself between gain and loss is the highest balance of life.

Whether one's efforts succeed or fail, one must assume the attitude of a witness and allow the state of *samatvam*, equanimity, to come into one's life. That state has been called yoga. When the mind is balanced and contented, one feels happiness. One may continue to have expectations, but not be obsessed with them. When one expects a result, it becomes the goal and purpose of life, which enables one to make an effort. If the expectation is renounced and one says, "Whatever has to happen will happen", no one will be able to walk the path due to too many diversions. Therefore, whoever comes into this world should walk with an expectation, but success or failure should not lead them astray.

LETTING GO

What is the most important philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita?

Swami Satyananda: Every word, statement and stanza of the *Bhagavad Gita* is important, but it has a nucleus, a seed, a basic philosophy. It is said (2:47):

*Karmanyevaadhikaraste maa phaleshu kadaachana;
Maa karmaphalaheturbhoomaa te sango'stvakarmani.*

Your right is to work only, but never its fruits; let not the fruits of actions be your motive, nor become attached to inaction.

One's sphere is the fulfilment and accomplishment of the duty and nothing beyond that. The results, outcomes and consequences are none of one's business. The individual's right is only to do the work. One has no right over the result of the work, which is beyond one's control and authority. Doing action is within one's authority, but the results of the action are not. If a person is worrying, he is an idiot. Ambition should not be the cause of the action or work, as it does not pay in the long run.

Life does not run on expectations. If one makes expectations the basis of life, one will have a nervous breakdown. People should not live in expectation of the results, but of course everyone bases their life on expectation. They should just limit themselves to the performance of karma. People who rise to the highest pinnacle of spiritual life are those who limit themselves to the accomplishment of duty, karma and dharma.

No one should be idle. A person should not renounce karma, even a sannyasin, even a millionaire or billionaire, even a master of a thousand servants, even an emperor, a king, president or prime minister. One should also not become an agent of the consequences of karma. Those who think about the results and outcomes can never rest as they

are tossed like a shuttlecock from one end to another. It is the greatest mistake a person can make due to a lack of understanding of the role of karma in life.

Karma is an expression of one's total energy. It is an expression of the great instinct, intelligence and intuition that one can express in the form of karma as an engineer, painter, carpenter, shopkeeper, housewife, and as a swami! A labourer can express it. People are suffering because they work for an end. It is true that one has a physical body and, therefore, one needs to survive in the realm of matter, or *prakriti*, so one works and receives a little pay.

There are many methods of performing action without desiring its fruits. While working, one should think of nothing but the work itself and, if possible, not the fruits. One should do the work at hand to the best of one's ability, and a person who is devotionally inclined may do it as worship.

How is it possible to perform action without any expectation at all?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are two types of actions: *sakama*, with expectation and desire, and *nishkama*, without expectation and desire. The fulfilment of personal desires is based on name, fame, power, money, security, and so on. The focus is external, social, personal, self-oriented and self-motivated. At this level, one is seeking fulfilment and satisfaction. If one works, one wants to earn money for self-satisfaction, to support the family, to have a new car, TV or fridge. There is always an ambition to be fulfilled. As long as there is ambition, there is expectation.

Whenever one performs karma, one is responsible for the action and its outcome. The action can result in praise or abuse, gain or loss. While performing actions, one is conscious of what leads to gain. An action leading to abuse or loss of money will be avoided. One is constantly looking for ways to avoid the unpleasant. This kind of action is known as *sakama*, which means working for the pleasant and avoiding the unpleasant. This is action with expectation.

Once the expectation is fulfilled, it gives birth to another expectation and another action. Expectation and action are integral parts of the same; it is difficult to separate an action from an expectation. A person works because he expects a pay cheque at the end of the month as the result of his action. A person practises yoga because of an expectation for some good and wonderful result. One becomes involved in different activities because of an expectation. Life without expectation is something that most people cannot understand.

Nishkama means being disinterested, doing work without expectation. It would be wrong to say that one can exist entirely without expectation. There is expectation, but instead of mundane, worldly expectation, it is directed towards spiritual thoughts and God. Action without expectation is performed with the mind fixed on spiritual, not worldly, thoughts. A servant performs many tasks, but does so without identifying with the actions. He knows that the outcome of each task is the responsibility of the master who is giving the instructions. Similarly, in order to become free from expectations, one needs to develop the same attitude towards God, and think of whatever one does as service to God, guru or humanity. Expectations are caused by association with the world, the senses and objects. Detachment from expectations is the result of going beyond the normal associations of the mind and connecting with the higher reality.

Karma yoga is associated with awareness of action and the corresponding expectation. The goal may or may not be attained, but one must be able to detach oneself from the expectation. It does not mean that one rejects the expectation; instead one recognizes the expectation and remains detached from its influence and attraction. The actions become more creative, dynamic and full of genius, whereas actions with expectations do not allow the genius nature to manifest.

Karma yoga is giving one's best shot, without holding back. It is allowing creativity to manifest in the performance

of an action, and offering it as a service to humanity and divinity. One gains more by not having any expectations. Ambition is not for a yogi, but his action takes the form of an experience. Whether he says or does something right or wrong, and someone pelts him with roses or stones, it will simply be an experience for him. He will not become angry or depressed, but will try not to make the same mistake twice. This is known as karma yoga.

The fluctuation of emotions has to be controlled in order to develop the attitude of a karma yogi, who tries to do each and every action better every time. With practice he can do it. He cannot create a transformation in the mind just by thinking that he will perform selfless actions from today. There has to be an awareness of performing the actions, not with a vested interest, but to express his creativity and ensure that whatever he does gives good results.

How can the problems associated with having expectations be overcome?

Swami Satyananda: One has to find a way of creating action whereby the consequences have no affect. That path is known as karma yoga. Whatever action is done should not depend on attachment to the fruits. Performing action with an expectation of particular results is the root cause of unhappiness. If one has any right to the fruits of one's work, one will also have to bear the consequences. Adi Shankaracharya said, "If you have a thirst for the results of works, you will have to reap those fruits." If a person wants to own the result, he must also suffer the three types of results: positive, negative and mixed.

A person who owns the result will have to own all three types of outcomes: positive result, happiness; negative result, unhappiness, and mixed result, suspense and doubt. There is no action that produces only positive or negative results. Every result is a mixture of good and bad. Therefore, suffering and enjoyment go together. Non-expectation of results does not mean that one should not receive a

payment or salary when working in the office, school, home or elsewhere. It means that one should work without any expectation. Benefits from helping, serving or working for others will certainly be received, even when they are not expected.

The first principle in karma yoga is that the results don't belong to the doer, and the second is to keep the mind serene. These are the two internal philosophies of karma yoga. *Nishkama karma yoga* is practised when a person does not own the result of the action or work.

In the ashram many people come to work and then go away. When people do the work, it produces a result, but they do not own that result. When they go away, the work they have done in the ashram does not become a part of their karma or destiny as they have done it with serenity and disowned the result.

Along with one's work and worldly engagements, one more quality should be cultivated, non-attachment in the form of sacrificing expectation for the results of the work. Since one has to reap the results anyway, one should make the mind so strong and attentive that it does not feel the influence of the results. One is not shaken, whether the result is positive, negative or mixed. Sri Krishna says that one should not be shaken by anything, or influenced by the results of action (18:6):

*Etaanyapi tu karmaani sangam tyaktvaa phalaani cha;
Kartavyaaneeti me paartha nishchitam matamuttamam.*

But even these actions should be performed leaving aside attachment and the desire for rewards, O Arjuna!
This is My certain and best conviction.

How can an action be performed without desire? How can one remain unaffected by the result of an action? If these two things can be understood, one is freed from the bondage of life in spite of being surrounded by the innumerable inconsistencies and problems of living.

There is a formula for achieving this state. First, the work itself should be thought of as the cause or the motive. Whether one does it or not, the work will still be done. Second, the fruits that result from the work are to be shared with others. A person can overcome fears and anxieties by developing the philosophy that he is only a worker or an actor, and the results are not his concern.

One only has to work within one's capacity and act without expectation. There are many factors that control the rewards, the profits or losses. It is really useless to have expectations; it is far better to prepare the mind to accept anything. If the mind is prepared in this way, whatever a person does is karma yoga. Even if involved in attachment to children, friends, property, and so on, one will have no problems. Therefore, detachment must be cultivated and expectations for the results of one's work must be sacrificed.

How does karma yoga help to overcome unhappiness and the bondage of karma?

Swami Sivananda: Work cannot bring misery. It is the attachment and identification with the work and the fruits of the action that bring worries, troubles and unhappiness. One who understands the secret of karma yoga and works without attachment and identification soon attains God-consciousness. *Jnana agni*, the fire of wisdom, burns the fruits of actions. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:19):

*Yasya sarve samaarambhaah kaamasankalpavarjitaah;
Jnaanaagnidagdhakarmaanam tamaahuh panditam budhaah.*

He whose undertakings are devoid of desire and selfish purpose, and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, the wise call a sage.

The person who knows the secret of work, the technique of karma yoga, will be absolutely free from the taint or bondage of karma. The secret is to work without attachment and egoism. It is the selfish motive, not the work itself, that binds

a person to *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death. Attachment is the real death, whereas non-attachment is eternal life. Non-attachment gives freedom from sorrow and fear and makes a person absolutely bold and fearless. The lot of the person who expects fruits is pitiable indeed! He is the most miserable person in this world.

How does karma yoga help to overcome suffering?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga channels the dynamic mental tendencies into selfless work; otherwise, everyday happenings hurt the mind. Love and hatred affect the mind. When a child is born one is happy and when someone dies one is unhappy. Happiness arises at one time and unhappiness at another, which disturbs the mental balance. This is the main reason for the downfall of a person's spirituality. A karma yogi does not live like that. He faces happiness and unhappiness but remains unaffected. He is connected with everybody and everything in life, but is not affected by the result of the karma. Nothing in life is unholy; no work can cause a downfall. However, attachment to the fruits of karma is the one thing that causes the downfall of spirituality.

In the Bible this theme is found in the parable of Adam and Eve, where the apple taken by Eve from the tree of life is the fruit of everyday karma. The word 'fruit' means result, either positive or negative. When one does something and a good or bad result accrues, one feels happy or unhappy. When one is happy, one is unbalanced and when one is unhappy, one is also unbalanced. Mental balance is lost due to the results of karma. In order to gain mental control, one will have to learn how to practise karma yoga in daily life.

Rich or poor, nobody in this world is happy. Everyone has his tale of woe to tell. Therefore, a karma yogi must adjust his mind. He should fulfil his obligations, duties and responsibilities. He should fulfil his desires and passions, but not be hurt by whatever comes as a result. The moment

a person becomes attached to the consequences, results and fruits of the tree of life, he becomes mortal and falls. This is the secret of mental control.

PEACE AND PURITY

How can one learn to act without expecting rewards?

Swami Sivananda: Worldly-minded people cannot understand the spirit of nishkama service as their minds are saturated with impurities. Ignorant people say that no one can work without a motive. It is a great pity that they have not understood the essence and truth of karma yoga. Their minds are clouded with fantastic desires and selfishness, so they cannot grasp the underlying truth of karma yoga. They judge others from their own standpoint. Their minds and brains are so hardened they cannot vibrate properly to understand what a motiveless action is.

One should see the stupendous and magnanimous work turned out by Lord Buddha, Adi Shankaracharya and other such karma yogis. Their names are still remembered. The whole world worships them with reverence. Not an iota of selfish motive can be attributed to their actions. They lived for rendering service to others.

One should do service for some time in order to grasp the spirit of karma yoga. One should work without any sort of motive and feel the effects, purity and inner strength that arise from it. This will result in an expanded heart and a feeling of indescribable joy.

In the beginning the actions may be selfish. However, after working hard in the field of karma yoga for two years, five actions will be unselfish and ninety-five will be selfish. The motives must be scrutinized vigilantly and purified. After some years of incessant struggle, fifty actions will become unselfish, until finally the time will come when all actions will be unselfish one hundred percent. One will become a perfect karma yogi like King Janaka. That time is not far away for the person who keeps the karma yoga ideal

before him daily, struggles hard to reach it and is sincere and earnest in his purpose.

The mind must be trained to work disinterestedly and tamed cautiously. One will have to discipline the mind with patience and perseverance. 'Work for the sake of the work without any motive' is easy to say, but countless difficulties will be encountered at every step when one tries to put it into practice. Only a jnani can do absolutely unselfish, motiveless action. A sannyasin, who has renounced the world, can do selfless deeds, but a householder's mind is saturated with many desires. Gradually he too can wean the mind away from expecting rewards. It is all a matter of disciplining the mind. By and by the selfish nature will be destroyed. He will understand the glory of karma yoga and be able to do work without any motive or expectation.

A karma yogi does not expect a return of love, appreciation, gratitude or admiration from the people he is serving. A parent does not expect anything from the small child he is doing something for. In a similar manner, one has to work for others without expecting anything in return, expand one's heart and think that the whole world is one's own self. It gives a little pain in the beginning, as selfless and disinterested service has not been performed in this way before. If it is too difficult to work without any motive, have the strong motive for freedom. This motive does not bind, and it destroys the other lower selfish motives. Eventually, this one motive will die by itself, just as the stick used in burning a dead body is consumed itself in the end.

The joy of a developed karma yogi is really unbounded. Words cannot adequately describe his exalted state and inward happiness. When the thought of doing good becomes part and parcel of his being, he will not entertain the least motive. There is immense delight in serving others and doing good for others. Vigorous karma yoga gives a peculiar joy and bliss, which once tasted can never be forgotten. The force of karma yoga induces one to work more and more with great zeal and enthusiasm.

The karma yogi begins to feel that this world is a manifestation of God, and gains immense inner strength and purity of heart. The heart is filled with mercy, sympathy and pure love. The spirit of self-sacrifice grows ad infinitum and selfishness is annihilated. The karma yogi develops inner spiritual strength and power by performing selfless and motiveless actions.

Wouldn't sadhana such as meditation be more effective than karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sadhana alone does not purify or remove the samskaras and karmas of the aspirant. Sadhana can give a glimpse of what lies ahead, but purification has to take place through karma yoga. In the early days of the ashram, a man came to the ashram and saw everyone working hard. He said to Swami Satyananda, "Why don't you teach your disciples any sadhana or scriptures? What will they gain from all this karma yoga?" Swami Satyananda replied, "My disciples will gain a state of purification and harmony through karma yoga that other sadhakas cannot gain even after twenty lifetimes of sadhana and study." This idea is still true today. Purification is spontaneous when karma yoga is practised, and an awareness of karma evolves along with the practice of other yogas. Karma yoga is an effective and valid yoga for experiencing the total self.

If there is no expectation, what is the incentive to work?

Swami Satyananda: Some people may say that if a person doesn't expect the fruits, there is no incentive to work. In the case of ignorant people it may be true that desire is an incentive to work. However, desire is not an incentive for a person who has become aware and has developed wisdom. He can also act without desire. A person who works without any desire for or expectation of the fruits is indeed a sannyasin.

There are two things to be considered: one is desire and the other sankalpa. How can the desire be transformed into

sankalpa? Even in family life the desire can be transformed into sankalpa, but it is possible only when one decides the aim, purpose and objective of the family. Why does one marry? Why does one have children? Why does one have a job? If one decides on an objective, the desire should be purified accordingly. When the objectives are properly understood, the actions create powerful results. The practice of karma yoga in daily life depends upon realization of the purpose of one's life. One must be careful about accepting the influence of the karma in the mind and at the same time one should try to realize why and for whom one is working.

If the desire for rewards is abandoned, how can enthusiasm be developed?

Swami Niranjanananda: There should be the awareness that karma is performed while working in any post or capacity, whether in an office, in a shop, as a doctor, or even as a sannyasin. Whatever the profession may be, there has to be an awareness and understanding of what one is doing and the purpose behind it. Normally one is not aware of the purpose behind the karma. If one works in an office, one thinks one is going to be paid at the end of the month, and the salary becomes the focus. However, if one identifies with creativity, an ordinary act becomes full of enthusiasm and creative optimism. If one identifies with the result or the gain that is expected from the completed work, one is not able to focus on creativity and heartfelt expression. That action has no meaning and is only a mechanical process.

This is the hardest training in spiritual life because the most difficult sadhana is to let go of the idea of gain as the result of action, and to identify only with creativity for self-purification. Once creativity and purity become part of the karma, there is no problem. The effort in karma yoga is to develop creativity and the feeling of inner purity while doing ordinary work, and in that work the karma yogi finds satisfaction, contentment and enthusiasm.

What are the results of letting go of expectations of rewards?

Swami Satyananda: Work done with total renunciation is called *nishkama karma*, selfless work. The residents in an ashram perform their activities without expecting any personal reward. They do not look for personal gains from the work they do. Instead, they divert all their energies to fulfilling the task, without any expectation for or attachment to the result. This induces a high level of awareness, and greater perfection can be achieved. In time, no matter what work is assigned, they become capable of doing it perfectly. Moreover, they develop an ability to overcome the conflicts and tensions which they face through their interactions with life.

Another thing happens in karma yoga: as one desires less and less fruits, one receives more and more beyond one's wildest dreams. To those who have a lot of expectation, little or nothing comes. Although no fruits are expected, karma yoga actually brings the greatest fruits; it brings peace of mind, higher awareness and knowledge.

Those aspirants who are practising yoga and want to attain deeper knowledge of the self, to have greater mastery over the fluctuations of the mind, or to awaken the forces within the mind and body, must remember that they should spend some time in karma yoga, where they work hard but the outcomes do not belong to them. Prahlad says in the *Srimad Bhagavata*:

*O my Lord, one who expects fulfilment
Of his desire with Your blessings
Is not a servant but a businessman.
One who is interested in fulfilling his own desires
By serving the master is not a servant.
One who fulfils his desires
Through the services of others
Is not a master at all.
O Lord, I am Your servant without interest,
And You are my master without expectation.*

*My relationship with You is not comparable
To that of a king and his servant,
Who have expectations of each other.*

Isn't it natural to expect praise for a job well done, even in karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: If praise is given, one should accept it, but one should not expect praise for work. Praise is not deserved as one is doing the work to help oneself. The effort to do karma yoga leads one towards higher levels of awareness. It is a privilege to work, to do karma yoga for happiness and spiritual evolvment. Nothing should be expected in return.



5

Meditation in Action

MEDITATION

What is the importance of daily actions in spiritual life?

Swami Sivananda: The goal of life should not be forgotten while in the midst of selfish activities. The goal of life is self-realization. Is one attempting to reach the aim of life? Has the ideal been kept before the mind's eye? That day in which spiritual sadhana is not practised is wasted. Give the mind to God and the hands to work. Every act can be spiritualized when the motive becomes pure. Work is meditation.

How can a divine connection develop through the ordinary actions of life?

Swami Sivananda: There is no person in the world who is not divine by nature. Their divinity differs only in degree, but not in kind. Even the so-called atheist has a ray of divinity in him. No person is devoid of the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas, in varying proportions. Whether one is a sceptic, an atheist, a nihilist or something else, the portion of sattwa that abides in a person helps him to do virtuous actions. This results in further actions of a similar nature, either in this birth or in future births. When a person does actions of a rajasic and tamasic nature, he also does sattwic actions, according to the degree of purity and sattwa in him.

No one in the world commits only vicious actions, whether he is a robber, thief or pirate. Everyone commits both virtuous and vicious actions in life. One is prone to do mixed actions as long as one is under the grip of prakriti. When virtuous actions are done, the mind naturally turns towards the divine, however slightly it may be. At that time, a sense of inner joy is experienced, although one may not be able to express why. Meditation is essentially the quality of sattwa. When life is made noble, the person is sure to think of God.

In this connection, the point worthy of remembrance is that sattwic actions themselves are to be considered as worship or meditation. Meditation need not necessarily mean sitting in a lonely corner and thinking about Rama, Krishna, Jesus or Mohammed, or pouring forth verbal or mental prayers. Actions that tend to purify the grossness of the individual are to be treated as meditation. In the case of an ordinary individual, life is meditation coupled with *ajnana*, ignorance, to an immeasurable degree. Life and meditation are intertwined.

How does helping others free one from limitations?

Swami Satyananda: Helping others is helping oneself indirectly towards spiritual progress. That is how one becomes aware of the samskaras of the subconscious mind. If one can know the psychology of others, the inner side of others, one can know what is least and most in oneself. What is wrong in oneself can be corrected. One cannot change or remove the samskaras, but one knows how to create and direct them properly; for example, by converting anger into devotion, it is being rechannelled.

Anger causes great suffering to others, and later on one feels guilty and reacts badly. If the anger is just converted into devotion, one will feel better, be happy and others will be happy. This is a kind of medicine by which one can cure the sickness of others, whether psychological or physical. Physical sickness is mainly related to the mind, so when the mind feels happy, the physical sickness will go away automatically.

While awakening one's little psychosis and getting rid of limitations, one becomes unlimited. While surrendering and devoting oneself, and serving others, one sees God, the universal consciousness. The aspirant merges into the superconsciousness, the universal consciousness, and has universal perception. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (14:26):

*Maam cha yo'vyabhichaarena bhaktiyogena sevate;
Sa gunaansamateetyaitaanbrahmabhooyaaya kalpate.*

He who serves Me with unswerving devotion, he, crossing beyond the gunas, is fit to become Brahman.

How is karma yoga a form of meditation?

Swami Niranjanananda: People believe that meditation is a practice in which one closes the eyes, focuses the mind, isolates oneself from what is happening, and finds peace. That is the general belief. However, there are various systems of meditation, which work on different dimensions and levels of one's nature. Meditation is attaining equipoise or balance in these various expressions. Meditation is not isolating but harmonizing oneself. It is not closing the eyes and forgetting the world, but making oneself part of the world in a much more dynamic and vibrant way. Absorption, or *samadhi*, is the final stage of meditation.

Karma yoga is the first yoga described in the Upanishads as being necessary in order to understand the state of perfection. Karma yoga is one of the main branches or *angas* of yogic discipline, as described in the vedic tradition. Karma is literally translated as 'action', which is something everyone in this world performs, whether consciously or unconsciously. When the word yoga is added to the word karma, it means any action is performed with meditative awareness. *Karma yoga* is actually the yoga of dynamic meditation. When there is awareness of the actions being performed at different levels, internally as well as externally, that awareness becomes a meditative process.

Karma yoga can be classified as the true psychological aspect of yoga, as in this process of dynamic meditation one

has to become aware of the subtle areas of the personality. This dynamic aspect of meditation involves the awakening of latent mental faculties as well as new dimensions of awareness. A caterpillar lives at ground level and cannot fly, but it leaves the ground and begins to fly when it becomes a butterfly. The body of a caterpillar represents bondage, but when the time comes for it to undergo transformation, it builds a cocoon around itself. It goes through a period of trauma and transformation and emerges as a beautiful butterfly. That is the principle of karma yoga.

This caterpillar represents the individual identity, known as *jiva*, which is subject to the limitation and bondage of karma. Human beings are like caterpillars, living at ground level all the time. In order to become free from karma, to exhaust karma, to become a butterfly, one has to withdraw into oneself, into one's own personality. This withdrawal can be compared to the state in which the caterpillar builds a cocoon around itself. Within that cocoon, it changes itself, its body and abilities, so that when it leaves the cocoon, instead of crawling, it begins to fly. The state in which one finds oneself right now is the state of bondage, represented by the caterpillar. By the practice of karma yoga one goes through a state of transformation, and with persistence and understanding of the present state, one eventually breaks down the old body and adopts a new one, which becomes the means of attaining light and freedom.

The aim of karma yoga is harmonizing the actions of the individual self and attaining union with the higher self. When karma yoga is looked upon as meditation, it becomes a process of awareness, concentrated action and mental one-pointedness. Dissipation of energies and consciousness is controlled by karma yoga, and this eventually brings about a state of purity and transcendence. Karma yoga and meditation are processes of rediscovering oneself, and the meditative experience is applied externally in behaviour and actions. Karma yoga is a way of developing immunity from the influences of life.

Meditative awareness completely changes and transforms the whole nature of life when applied to an external action. Karma yoga means performing action with meditative awareness from moment to moment. The actions must not only be performed consciously, the attitude towards the actions must also be observed. Actions are performed by everyone and are motivated by a desire for self-satisfaction or gain. The motto of karma yoga is 'give, give, give', not 'take, take, take'. This attitude and awareness related to an external action changes the outlook and the vision broadens.

While performing an action on the physical level, there has to be total meditative awareness. By being aware at the time of performing action or karma, one is initially trying to see how the action is performed. Once awareness has been developed, one can see which reactions can be experienced from a particular type of karma. It is here that karma yoga stops being a physical process and becomes a meditative process. By adding the component of awareness and the will to act with the proper attitude, intention and mentality, karma yoga becomes a process of natural and spontaneous meditation.

What is meant by meditative dynamism?

Swami Satyananda: Not everyone feels any obvious, overwhelming devotion to someone or something. In this case, one should try to be aware of one's actions and act like a witness, an observer of all activities as though they are occurring outside of oneself. Thoughts and physical actions and reactions have to be watched with a disinterested attitude. This is closely related to detachment and leads to the dissolution of the ego.

Anyone who is practising or is trying to practise karma yoga does not necessarily need to believe in any religion or higher existence, nor is it necessary to discard personal beliefs. One should try to work selflessly, whether sweeping the floor, writing a book, conducting a scientific experiment or doing the household duties.

Karma yoga means meditative dynamism – a simple definition, yet with profound implications. One must be wide awake, and yet not conscious of the little self. One must forget oneself while simultaneously being involved in intense activity. The body and mind perform multitudinous actions, yet one remains in a state of contemplation and meditative awareness. This is the ideal, but it cannot occur by thinking about it – practice and effort are necessary.

How can a meditative process be developed?

Swami Niranjanananda: Science accepts the fact that every kind of action creates a result, a reaction, which may not necessarily be in the same context as the initial action. It could be subtle, take a different form or be a different experience. The clapping of two hands produces a sound; striking two material objects together creates a sound, a spark, or some other reaction. Each action creates a different result. The reactions are not always similar to the actions and can have a different nature altogether.

What a person thinks and experiences on both the physical and subtle dimensions creates different kinds of karma. It also creates different types of reactions in the personality, which are not perceived immediately. A childhood experience can manifest later on in life in the form of a fear, a complex or an inhibition. The experience one has today will manifest later on in life in another form. These reactions may be negative and limiting or positive and open. By being aware at the time of performing action or karma, one is initially trying to see how the action is performed. Later, when awareness has been developed, one can see which reactions can be experienced from a particular type of karma. It is here that karma yoga stops being a physical process and becomes a meditative process.

AWARENESS

What is the importance of awareness in karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga is not just selfless service or detachment from the rewards accruing from work, but work done with a higher level of concentration and awareness. In karma yoga, awareness is essential to develop the ability to work, while simultaneously being a witness to the action, like a detached observer. One is able to work more efficiently in this manner without being swayed by personal whims and prejudices, or motivated by ego, likes and dislikes. One does what is necessary in the given circumstances without favour, acting from the very core of one's being, the self.

In karma yoga the importance of the work does not lie in what a person is doing, but in how he does it, his awareness and concentrated efforts. Is the mind distracted by desire and ambition, or is it one-pointed on the given task? As the mind becomes more refined, the awareness is heightened, concentration is achieved and the consciousness evolves to a higher dimension. One is not paid according to the action, but according to one's state of consciousness. This is precisely the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*. A person may live anywhere and do anything, but he should be sincere in his aspiration for spiritual life, that's all.

The inner motives must be totally dedicated to the purpose of Brahman. Swami Vivekananda said, "Work is inevitable and it must be so; but one should work towards the highest purpose." One should not merely work, but work with awareness and gain more from the work. This is the aim of karma yoga. If the motives are totally dedicated to that supreme experience, one is like the ocean. Countless rivers flow into the ocean every hour, but the ocean does not transcend its boundary. Exactly the same thing happens in a person who has higher consciousness. Whatever a person desires or does will be consumed as he is like an ocean – passions and desires find a resort in him.

The root of power in a person is awareness. If the awareness can be developed by gradual practice and effort, it will be possible to communicate, circulate, operate and correspond with different spheres of reality, whether physical, mental, psychic or spiritual.

What makes karma yoga an effective tool for transformation?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a difference between the karma yoga practised by yogis, who are internally aware, and by *bhogis*, who are looking for sensual pleasure. In the first group there is awareness of the mind, intellect and interaction, and karma yoga becomes a process of meditation in itself. In the second group, karma yoga is taken in its literal meaning of 'action' and becomes a process of fulfilment of desires and ego. This group develops a greater sense of security, ownership, affluence and selfishness.

Everybody in the world is definitely selfish, both yogis and *bhogis*. The difference between karma yoga for the yogi and karma for the householder is only a matter of awareness and realization. On one side, one tries to find a balance within oneself by doing actions. On the other side, a person simply goes headlong into the world to derive self-satisfaction and pleasure. Both lead the same kind of lifestyle, do the same kind of work and live within the same family situation.

In karma yoga there must be awareness and understanding of one's performance and action, attitude and behaviour, while not being influenced by them. That is the first *sadhana*. One should be aware of one's performance and how one responds to situations, and know whether it is limiting or uplifting. If that can be done, one is a karma yogi because there is balance in action. The moment one finds balance in action, one becomes a karma yogi and attains a rung on the ladder of yoga.

What is the role of the mind in karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga is awareness of the total activity that is taking place in the body, mind, intellect and emotions. Karma is the term used for every kind of interaction that takes place at the lower, intermediate and higher levels. Therefore, karma does not simply mean action, but the whole process of activity. Physical work is only one aspect of karma yoga. Another aspect is awareness of the mental actions.

In the practice of *antar mouna*, inner silence, the thought process is observed. One finds the link in the thoughts and tries to go deeper. This is mental karma yoga. It is not an experience of a state but of the activity, which is the link binding the totality of one's expression, thought, feeling and behaviour together. It provides an awareness of the point where the karmas are born, where they take place and where they are experienced by a human being.

Karma yoga is the recognition that a beautiful smell is emanating from a rose, or a putrid smell from a piece of flesh, causing attraction or repulsion. It is not just acceptance of that attraction or repulsion, but acknowledgement of it as an experience, which makes yoga relevant in terms of karma. This is the aspect of karma yoga that Sri Krishna emphasized to Arjuna in the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Karma yoga is recognizing the mental states being experienced and learning how to deal with them. It is recognizing the attraction and pleasure derived from one situation and the repulsion or suffering derived from another situation, and the need to remain balanced in both.

One of the purposes of karma yoga is to create proper awareness of the role that the mind plays in relation to the individual personality. Karma yoga is awareness of the movement of life. It is an understanding of how a person interacts with himself and with his environment. Five thousand years ago Sri Krishna said that people in the world had never understood karma yoga, and this statement still holds true today. Karma yoga involves an understanding of

human nature and an awareness of the total personality. It is a process of observing one's entire movement in life from gross to subtle to spiritual.

Why are attitude and awareness more important than the work itself in karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: In karma yoga, it is not the actions themselves that are considered to be important, but the frame of mind with which the actions are performed. Sri Aurobindo said, "The spirit and consciousness from which an action is done is what makes it a yogic action, not the action itself." Actions happen anyway, without one's knowledge, and they will continue to influence one's life, whether one wishes them to or not. Action is a continuous process which keeps on happening, and there is no voluntary or rational control over it. The attitude towards action and work is most important in karma yoga. The awareness of action and work is the important factor, not the work itself. This change of attitude eventually creates a change within.

In a murderer's hand a knife is used to take away someone's life, and in a doctor's hand it is used to save life. It is the attitude of the person holding the knife that is important. The frame of mind has to be a positive, bright, optimistic attitude towards life and the actions involved in life. Along with this positive attitude, there should also be a drive to attain realization. This attitude must lead to a meditative experience. The whole aim of karma yoga is to lead one into a meditative state of awareness, an awakened state of consciousness, where one becomes an observer of what is happening and how these actions and interactions influence, bind and limit one's expressions and personality.

How can a person begin to practise karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga can be incorporated in the day-to-day, moment to moment activities if it is remembered that whatever one does should be done with

awareness. Whatever work one is involved in should be a conscious activity not an unconscious activity. While writing, one should be aware of the process of writing, the handwriting and what is being written. While driving, one should extend the attention and awareness into the driving, become the car, the road, the traffic light and the driver. One should not allow anything to happen mechanically, but bring the concept of awareness into every activity.

The first step of karma yoga is extending the awareness into every activity one is involved in. It is the simplest form of karma yoga. Karma yoga means recognition of karma, gradually, at all levels. One should begin with the physical actions and observe how they affect the mind, how they create disturbance and distress and how they also bring happiness, joy and fulfilment in life. One should understand which attitudes are needed to maintain and fine-tune these karmas. This is the training of karma yoga.

THE SEER

Who is a drashta?

Swami Satyananda: The *Bhagavad Gita* evolves a new technique or tune on which Sri Krishna harps from the beginning till the end. He says that there is a faculty, a mood of awareness in everyone, called the *drashta*, or seer, which is not the doer, or the enjoyer, or the sufferer. A drashta is one who is not subject to destiny. He is one who is always aware of what is taking place. This faculty of awareness is unmanifest in an ignorant person, but manifest in the wise.

When the individual says, “I am suffering,” or “I am enjoying,” it is true, but at the same time, he is aware of the fact that ‘he is enjoying’. This awareness is a special privilege in man, and it is not found among animals. This faculty of being able to witness, called the drashta or seer, has to be evolved by separating the witnessing consciousness from the personality. It is a new technique that Sri Krishna has evolved.

How can awareness be cultivated in karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first component of karma yoga is awareness. Becoming aware begins with the practice of asana and physical movement. If one moves a finger, one is aware of the movement of the finger, the pull of the muscles and the movement of the joints. The emerging awareness dissects the finger into bones, muscles and nerves. The muscles and bones move differently, the nerves and ligaments pull differently, and the awareness becomes more acute and subtle. What was observed before as one experience is later seen in its various components and forms. The aim of asana is to make one aware of the body and how it expresses itself in normal situations. Awareness in asana leads to comfort and stability.

In the *Yoga Sutras* (2:46), Sage Patanjali defines asana as a posture in which one is comfortable and stable:

Sthirasukhamaasanam

Steady and comfortable should be the posture.

When people have been sitting for twenty minutes, some will be stable and comfortable and some will not. Most people are not connected with the body. They sit, but are not aware of sitting. They walk, but are not aware of walking. They move the body, but are not aware of the movement. The purpose of asana is to develop a state of comfort and stability, but recognition of comfort and stability comes only when one becomes aware.

The second component of karma yoga is mental observation of the reactions and inner behaviour. Someone says, "You are beautiful; you are a great and wonderful person." Someone else says, "You are hopeless." These opinions affect a person's sensitivity and create a reaction which dominates his preconceptions, beliefs and ideas. The mood changes and there is a feeling of either elation or depression. A single opinion has the force to alter one's mood! However, in karma yoga one becomes aware and

observes the reactions. In the *Yoga Sutras* (1:3) Sage Patanjali states:

Tadaa drashtuh svaroope' vasthaanam.

Then the seer is established in his own essential nature.

Who is this seer or observer, and what is his role? In the first stage the seer has to experience how he is responding and reacting to people, situations and circumstances. This is an important aim of meditation as well. Through meditation one experiences and observes the changes in the moods of the mind. When a person is aware of the mental expressions, he will be able to guide and direct them.

Meditation becomes a process of realizing the subtle mental and emotional movement or karma. In order to develop the attitude of karma yoga, one has to observe oneself, one's actions and reactions. One has to develop the attitude of a seer.

What are the benefits of becoming established in the witnessing attitude in karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: People say that aspirants should do karma yoga in an ashram because it is practised with objective awareness. External karma yoga is emphasized to give this understanding of objectivity in relation to one's actions. The awareness one gains outside is then transferred to the mind, so that one's *sadhana*, one's own practices of meditation and contemplation, give better results. This objectivity helps to channel the conflicting energies which arise from attachments to the unfiltered mind-stuff passing through the psyche. This filtering out is the process of karma yoga.

Becoming the *drashta*, the witness, and eventually controlling the karma leads to the state of inactivity in action. That is the state of God today, on this date, at this time. He is totally inactive and all the action is happening. If one looks at one's spirit, it is inside, totally inactive, and all

the actions are happening through the agency of the mind and senses. Just as the spirit is inactive, God is also inactive. In order to allow God to function, one has to deactivate the senses, externally and internally, from the external objects and the internal attachments. Two eyes see duality; one eye sees unity. When the one eye opens and sees unity, the cause of duality is burnt.

How can dislikes be managed?

Swami Niranjanananda: The prerequisite of karma yoga, apart from doing the work, is the development of the *drashta* or *sakshi bhava*, the attitude of the observer, witness or seer, even if one is sweeping the floor. If a person does not like the work, it is the mind playing its game. If a person has to clean toilets for years and years continuously, and the mind complains, that is his likes and dislikes playing their game. If a person feels that he is being forced to do something, again it is his likes and dislikes coming into play, his ambitions playing their game. The transcendental state of the mind is not like that. It has the ability to transform every action into harmony and bliss.

Through karma yoga one can eliminate conflicts and establish oneself in *anandamaya kosha*, the state of bliss, but this is difficult. For many people, karma yoga has simply meant a method of subjugating the mind, of submitting to somebody else's will, and this is totally alien to most people. It causes great confusion and misunderstanding. People feel they should never submit to somebody else's will. In karma yoga, however, one is not actually submitting to another person's will, although the intellect may think so. Rather, one is submitting to one's own whims by not wanting to do a particular work.

Every action is followed by a reaction. One has to learn to be aware of and accept both the action and the reaction by learning how to develop the *drashta*, by becoming aware of the observer or seer within. When one can become aware of the two types of experience, the seen and the unseen, the

experiences cease to have any effect on the mind. Just as a person can see the effects of something happening around him, in the same way he can also experience the internal, unseen effects of the same events taking place around him, without becoming their victim.

A gross example may convey the meaning. Eating is an external action: bringing the hand to the mouth, chewing and swallowing the food. Here the external action stops, and the internal action begins with the process of digestion. One does not know how it happens. One might be doing anything, sleeping, jumping up and down or travelling, but the digestive process goes on. No matter what one does, the digestion goes on and there is no way of stopping it. Nobody on the planet can say, "Okay, my food is partially digested. Now I'll stop the process of digestion and keep the food in my stomach for another five or six hours."

These are the two types of experience: the seen event, which one has some kind of control over; and the unseen event, which takes place but which one has no control over. Therefore, the first rule of karma yoga is to maintain a proper frame of mind. By observing everything, the aspects of *kriya*, action, and *karana*, cause, automatically begin to transform themselves. The physical, psychological and spiritual cause and effect of karma and samskara are there, as well as the cause and effect that goes beyond the rationality of the mind.

Karma yoga is a process of purging. If one has a doubt about a certain type of work, one should observe it. If one does not want to do the job, it is all right. One may not do it, but one should observe that stage. If one fights with another person, it is all right, but one should observe it. One should always observe what one is doing, as only then can one understand the principles of cause and effect, and overcome the duality of the mind. Becoming the drashta is important. Whether one fails as a sadhaka, sannyasin or householder is irrelevant, but becoming the witness is of utmost importance in order to become established in one's own nature.

One should try to understand karma yoga from this viewpoint. Every type of work, no matter if it is liked or disliked, should be taken as an opportunity to observe and reprogram the mind. This reprogramming can only take place when one is able to understand the *kriya* or action, the *karta* or doer, and the *karana* or cause.

An aspirant has to begin karma yoga by observing his action, participating wholeheartedly and putting his creative nature into it. Therefore, in the ashram there is exposure to many different situations where the aspirant knows he does not gain anything, yet tries to express his efficiency and creativity. He tries to become united with whatever he does, not through the ego, not by thinking, “This is menial and this is spiritual, this is high and this is low,” but by recognizing the tasks as actions that simply have to be done. Why should ego confrontation take place? Why not a gentle acceptance of the situation by being a part of it?

How can meditative or inner awareness be deepened in karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: One should live in the world as a witness. This is the royal road to happiness. One should not try to identify and establish relations with the changing, insignificant situations of this world. One should perform one’s duties and rise above personal sentiments. The practice of self-awareness needs to be incorporated into karma yoga. One should become conscious of that awareness which is separate from the thoughts and actions, from each perception of the five senses, and from the mind and intellect. Self-awareness is separate from the body, mind, thoughts and sounds, but it is ever present, constant and unchangeable.

Self-awareness is the object of concentration in this practice. In the morning and evening and at any time of the day, one should try to develop self-awareness and make it continuous for one or two minutes. While thinking, “I am”, suddenly I hear a car passing. At that moment the

awareness of the self, of 'I am', breaks. The awareness of the self, of 'I am', breaks with each thought other than 'I am', with each distraction. After weeks of practice, one's consciousness will become continuous, constant, unceasing and the stream of consciousness, of self-awareness, will last for up to half an hour.

Each person is engaged in work during the day, but when a break comes in the work, one should immediately begin to practise self-awareness for a minute or two. For as long as possible the self-awareness of 'I am' should be maintained. When a break in self-awareness comes, one may return to work again.

What should be done when the mind is affected by what is happening?

Swami Satyananda: Whenever one is doing karma yoga, some effect will show up, whether positive, negative or mixed. Usually the effect is mixed, and the mind is affected by the negative and not by the positive. That is the law of the mind. In karma yoga one must continue to do one's duty. Whatever one may have or expect to obtain, one should be consistent and keep oneself free from the effect of the influence of the karma or action. This is the right spirit of karma yoga. Every day one learns all over again to fall back on oneself, and not be carried away or distracted.

The tip is to be relaxed. If thoughts, feelings, demands or anger are allowed to take over, one is in trouble. It takes both time and energy to run away from trouble or to take a negative, defiant attitude. Life is now and it is being lived in the present. One has to take an active interest in what is going on and enjoy it.

How does becoming a karma yogi or observer lead to transformation?

Swami Nirananjananda: The process of observation, or the attitude of a drashta, witness or seer, is the keyword of karma yoga. One must observe what one is doing. Karma yoga is

not blind activity; it is activity with awareness and a purpose behind it. When this concept of observation or witnessing every action of mind and body is slowly developed, it leads to the expansion of consciousness. The person is able to understand what is happening, what type of activity or action is taking place and how that particular activity or action can be improved.

With the awakening of the awareness of the seer, one naturally and spontaneously becomes aware of the conflicts that go on inside. One becomes aware of the likes and dislikes, the ambitions and limitations. There is a process of filtering out the negative from the positive and rediscovering the personality. One becomes aware of one's attachments for the family or for a material object such as a car or a television, and feels it if those are broken or lost. When this attachment is observed, the detrimental effect to personality growth is filtered out, and, eventually, the effect that is conducive is also filtered out.

How can selfless action be developed?

Swami Niranjanananda: The karma yogi has to work gradually towards selfless action; it is not something that can be understood or attained in an instant. There has to be awareness attached to it. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is not the body or the mind but the self sitting inside performing the action.

Here is an analogy. A car is just a metallic structure with gears and an engine. The mind is like the ignition, which, once turned on, makes the car move forward. It is that initial spark coming from the spark plugs that ignites the engine and propels the body of the car forward, but it is the self, the driver sitting inside, who controls the ignition, brakes, clutch and lights.

The driver is separate from the car, the metallic structure, the gears and the movement taking place within the whole structure. The driver is unaware of what is happening inside the engine. He is just observing the instrument panel in

front of him. The driver is not there to observe how the gears are changing or whether or not the cylinders are firing sequentially inside the engine. He only has to monitor and observe the dials in order to know whether or not the car is working properly.

In the same way, it is the self that guides actions. The thrust of the *Bhagavad Gita* is that one has to experience the self within and not identify with the actual movement of the car. The movement of the car is irrelevant. It is the driver sitting inside who is important. This driver is the self. An individual can become aware of that driver or self by following the process described as karma yoga.



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BHAGAVAD GITA

1. Karma Yoga and the Mind

- (5:11) Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform action only by the body, mind, intellect and even by the senses, for the purification of the self. 8
- (5:7) One who is devoted to the path of action, whose mind is pure, who has conquered the self, subdued the senses and realized the Self as the Self in all beings, though acting, is not tainted. 21
- (1:29) O Kesava! My limbs fail and my mouth is parched, my body quivers and my hairs stand on end! 39
- (1:30) The Gandiva bow slips from my hand and my skin burns all over; I am unable even to stand, my mind is reeling, as it were, and I see adverse omens. 39
- (1:31) And I see adverse omens. 39

2. Identification

- (18:13) Learn from Me, O mighty-armed Arjuna, these five causes, as declared in the Samkhya system for the accomplishment of all actions! 48
- (18:14) The body, the doer, the various organs or senses, the different functions or energies of various sorts, and the presiding deity also, the fifth. 48
- (18:15) Whatever action a man performs by his body, speech and mind, whether right or the reverse, these five are its causes. 48
- (18:18) Knowledge, the known and the knower form the threefold impulse to action; the organ, the action and the agent form the threefold basis of action. 48
- (11:34) Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha, Karna and other courageous warriors, these have already been slain by Me. 49
- (11:33) Therefore, stand up and obtain fame. Conquer the enemies and enjoy the unrivalled kingdom. Verily by Me have they been already slain. Be you merely an instrument, O Arjuna! 50
- (13:29) He sees, who sees that all actions are performed by nature, prakriti, alone, and that the self is actionless. 53

(3:27) All actions are wrought in all cases by the qualities of nature, the gunas, only. He whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks: 'I am the doer'.	54
(2:19) He who takes the self to be the slayer and he who thinks he is slain, neither of them knows; he slays not nor is he slain.	54
(5:8) The harmonized knower of truth thinks, 'I do nothing at all', while seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing,	55
(5:9) Speaking, letting go, seizing, opening and closing the eyes – convinced that the senses move among the sense objects.	55
(3:28) He who knows the truth, O mighty-armed Arjuna, about the divisions of the qualities and their functions, knowing that the gunas as senses move amidst the gunas as the sense objects, is not attached.	56
(13:31) The Supreme Self, O Arjuna, being without beginning and devoid of qualities, imperishable, though dwelling in the body, neither acts nor is tainted!	57
(14:19) When the seer beholds no agent other than the gunas, knowing that which is higher than them, he attains to My Being.	57
(18:16) Now, such being the case, the person of perverted intelligence, who looks upon his self, which is isolated, as the agent, he sees not, owing to untrained understanding.	58
(5:13) Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing others (body and senses) to act.	58
(5:14) Neither agency nor actions does the Lord create for the world, nor union with the fruits of actions; it is nature that acts.	58
(4:18) One who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men, is a yogi and performer of all actions.	77
(4:16) What is action and what is inaction? Even the wise are confused about this. Therefore, I shall teach you such action, that will liberate you from the evil of birth and death.	79

(4:17) For, verily the true nature of action should be known, also that of forbidden or unlawful action, and of inaction; hard to understand is the nature of action.	79
(4:20) Having abandoned attachment to the fruit of action, always content, nowhere seeking refuge, depending on nothing, he is not doing anything, although engaged in activity.	79
(4:21) Not hoping for anything and with the mind self-controlled, having abandoned all greed, performing action by the body alone, he incurs no sin.	80
(4:22) Content with what comes to him without effort, free from the pairs of opposites, without envy, balanced in success and failure, although acting, he is not bound.	80
(4:23) Actions melt away in one who is devoid of attachment, who is harmonious, whose mind is controlled by wisdom and who works for the sake of sacrifice.	80
(4:24) Brahman is the oblation, Brahman is the clarified butter (ghee), by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman. Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action.	80
(3:4) Not by the non-performance of action does man reach actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation does he attain to perfection.	80
(3:6) He who restrains the organs of action and sits thinking of the sense objects in the mind; he, of deluded understanding, is called a hypocrite.	83
(3:7) But whosoever, controlling the senses by the mind, O Arjuna, engages himself in karma yoga with the organs of action, without attachment, he excels!	83

3. The Ego

(16:13) This has been gained by me today; this desire I shall obtain; this is mine and this wealth too shall be mine in future.	90
(18:17) He who is ever free from the egoistic notion, whose intelligence is not tainted, though he slays these people, he slays not, nor is he bound by the action.	92

(2:71) The man who abandons all desires attains peace and moves about without longing, without the sense of mine, and without egoism. 98

(13:9) Non-attachment, non-identification of the Self with son, wife, home and the rest, and constant even-mindedness in the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable is knowledge. 114

(18:53) Having abandoned egoism, strength, arrogance, anger, desire, and covetousness, free from the notion of “mine” and peaceful, one is fit for becoming Brahman. 114

4. Expectations

(2:51) The sages, united with pure reason, renounce the fruit which action yields, and, liberated from the bonds of birth, they go to the place beyond all evil. 123

(5:12) The united one, having abandoned the fruit of action, attains eternal peace; the non-united, impelled only by desire and attached to the fruit, is bound. 123

(4:14) Actions do not taint Me, nor have I a desire for the fruits of actions. He who knows Me thus is not bound by actions. 123

(2:47) Your right is to work only, but never its fruits; let not the fruits of actions be your motive, nor become attached to inaction. 126

(18:6) But even these actions should be performed leaving aside attachment and the desire for rewards, O Arjuna! This is My certain and best conviction. 130

(4:19) He whose undertakings are devoid of desire and selfish purpose, and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, the wise call a sage. 131

5. Meditation in Action

(14:26) He who serves Me with unswerving devotion, he, crossing beyond the gunas, is fit to become Brahman. 141

HOLY BIBLE

2. Identification

New Testament (John 10:29–30) My Father and I are one,
but my Father is greater than me. 71

SRIMAD BHAGAVATA

4. Expectations

O my Lord, one who expects fulfilment
Of his desire with Your blessings
Is not a servant but a businessman.
One who is interested in fulfilling his own desires
By serving the master is not a servant.
One who fulfils his desires
Through the services of others
Is not a master at all.
O Lord, I am Your servant without interest,
And You are my master without expectation.
My relationship with You is not comparable
To that of a king and his servant,
Who have expectations of each other. 137

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

5. Meditation in Action

(2:46) Steady and comfortable should be the posture. 150
(1:3) Then the seer is established in his own essential
nature. 151

YOGA VASISHTHA OF SAGE VASISHTHA

1. Karma Yoga and the Mind

(3:114:76) Employ your mind in your duties, without
being tarnished by your attachment to any; but remain as
the unsullied crystal, receiving the reflections of outward
objects, without being stained by any. 29

3. The Ego

(4:33:37) Egoism is the sprout of the tree of everyone's life. In the interminable revolutions through the world, the sense of I, 'me and mine' is the cause that expands the tree into a thousand branches. 89

(4:27:21) The knowledge that this is I and these are mine, and all others are separate or apart is the bane of human life; one with such thoughts becomes the receptacle of evils like the sea of salty waters. 97

(4:31:7) Therefore, O Rama! Be diligent and wipe away the sense of egoism from your heart. Always try to be happy by thinking 'I am not anything'. 99

(4:31:8) Selfish egotism is the root of the wide spread branches of misery in the forest of the world, which bear poisonous blossoms of desire. 99

(4:33:70) By investigating the nature of ahamkara and forsaking gross selfishness, one crosses over the ocean of the world through one's own efforts. 104

4. Expectations

(6:30:83) The mind that is led by its desire is always apprehensive of disappointment; and it coils back for fear of a reverse, as a timorous girl flies afar from the sight of a spectre. 119

Glossary

Abhimana – pride; egoism.

Abhinivesha – fear of death; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Adharma – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness.

Adi – first, primary, original.

Agni – fire; the god of fire.

Aham – 'I' or ego.

Ahamkara – faculty of ego, awareness of the existence of 'I'; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Ajnana – ignorance of reality; non-cognizance; unawareness; one of the five kleshas described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

Akara – form.

Akarta – non-doer.

Alasya – laziness.

Anandamaya kosha – sheath or body of bliss; the innermost wrapper or sheath of the embodied spirit. See Kosha.

Anga – limb; a constituent part; a step.

Anishta, anishtam – undesired; bad, evil; non-fulfilment of desire.

Annamaya kosha – sheath or body of matter; the sphere of existence created by food, maintained by food and which ultimately becomes food, i.e. the body. See Kosha.

Antahkarana – literally, ‘inner tool’, experienced or manifest mind, consisting of: ahamkara, manas, buddhi and chitta. See Bahyakarana.

Antar mouna – inner silence; meditative technique belonging to the fifth step of raja yoga (pratyahara). See Raja yoga.

Antaryamin – inner ruler; the Supreme Being present in every object of creation and guiding all creatures.

Apara – ordinary; opposite of para; material dimension; worldly knowledge. See Para.

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother, who was the son of Lord Indra and Kunti. In the *Bhagavad Gita* he received a divine revelation from Sri Krishna.

Asana – a specific yoga posture; used in hatha yoga to channel prana, open the chakras and remove energy blocks; in raja yoga, a physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself.

Asanga – unattached, free from ties; non-attachment.

Ashanti – restlessness; absence of peace of mind.

Ashram – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour.

Asmita – notion of ‘I’ or ‘I-ness’; awareness of ‘I am’ superimposed on the body, action and mind; the feeling of ‘I’ identified with an action; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Atma, atman – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life, highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul.

Atmanubhuti – perception, understanding of the self.

Atmashuddhi – purification of the self; purity of the self.

Aurobindo, Sri – (1872–1950) a famous yogi from Pondicherry, concerned with the transformative power of yoga on all levels of the human being.

Avarana – ignorance; veiling or covering which hides or excludes part of the reality; a function of maya. See Maya.

Avidya – ignorance of reality; ignorance.

Bahyakarana – external instrument (composed of anus, genitals, feet, hands and vocal equipment). See Karmendriya. See Antahkarana.

Bhagavad Gita – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga.

Bhajan – devotional song.

Bhakta – devotee.

Bhakti – intense inner devotion in which the intellect, emotions and self are channelled towards a relationship with the divine.

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a divine relationship; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen, and purify the emotions.

Bhava, bhavana – feeling; condition; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind.

Bhogi – a person with gross mentality and materialistic tendencies; sensualist; an individual involved in karma for personal satisfaction and not for inner purification.

Bhoj – food offering; feast.

Bhokta – one who enjoys experiences.

Brahma – god of the Hindu trinity who creates the universe; God as creator; manifest force of life and creation; ever-expanding, limitless Consciousness; Absolute Reality.

Brahman – etymologically ‘ever expanding, limitless consciousness’; name of Supreme Consciousness or cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; God as creator; monistic concept of Absolute Reality.

Brahmarishi – a member of the priestly caste (brahmana) who has attained realization; a sage with knowledge of Brahma loka.

Buddhi – discerning, discriminating aspect of the mind; aspect of the mind closest to pure consciousness; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu – (1486–1534) an inspired bhakta from Bengal.

- Chitta** – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; storehouse of memory or samskaras. one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.
- Chitta shuddhi** – purification of the mind; purity of consciousness.
- Darshan** – a glimpse; vision; direct perception; philosophy.
- Dharma** – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness.
- Dhyana** – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form, thought or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga.
- Dosha** – three humours of the body described in ayurveda: mucus (kapha), bile (pitta) and wind (vata). Their imbalance prevents the flow of energy in sushumna nadi.
- Drashta** – witness, uninvolved observer, onlooker, seer; the consciousness which knows what is going on; the inner self.
- Drishti** – seeing, viewing; knowing.
- Drishti dosha** – literally, 'defective vision'.
- Dukha** – suffering, pain.
- Dwesha** – repulsion, aversion; hatred, enmity, dislike; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.
- Gandhi, Mahatma** – (1869–1948) Indian national leader who established his country's freedom through a non-violent revolution.
- Ganga** – the river Ganges, the most sacred river in India; pingala nadi.
- Gayatri mantra** – a most sacred twenty-four syllable mantra which enables learning.
- Guda** – anus. See Karmendriya.
- Guna** – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti are sattwa, rajas and tamas.
- Guru** – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher of the science of ultimate reality who by

the light of his own atma can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind and enlighten the consciousness of a devotee/disciple; preceptor.

Hari – name of Vishnu, the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the preservation of the universe; Supreme Consciousness.

Indriya – sense organ; power of the senses; power.

Ishta, ishtam – object of desire; the chosen ideal; the particular form of God one is devoted to.

Ishta phala – literally, ‘the fruit of one’s desires’; the attainment of one’s desires.

Ishwara – higher reality; God; non-changing, indestructible principle or quality.

Ishwara pranidhana – cultivation of faith in the supreme or indestructible reality; surrender to God; complete dedication of one’s actions and will to the Lord; one of the *niyamas* described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Ishwararpana – worship of the Lord; offering to God.

Jagrat – the waking state; dimension of consciousness, related to the senses and the phenomenal material universe.

Jala – water.

Janaka, King – father, progenitor; name of a famous king of Videha or Mithila, who was the foster-father of Sita. He was remarkable for his great knowledge, good works and holiness.

Japa – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra.

Jiva – principle of life; individual or personal soul; living being.

Jnana – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience.

Jnana agni – the fire of wisdom.

Jnana yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and study of scriptures; leading a discriminative lifestyle, living with wisdom.

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life.

Kamsa, King – a tyrannical king killed by Sri Krishna.

Kapha – mucus, phlegm, one of the three humours (*doshas*) described in *ayurveda*. See *Dosha*.

Karana – cause, reason; the unmanifest potential cause that in due time takes shape as the visible effect.

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect.

Karma phalasha – expectation on the outcome of action.

Karma yoga – yogic path of action; union with the Supreme Consciousness through action; action without attachment to the fruits of action.

Karmendriya – motor organ; there are five physical organs of action, viz. vocal cords, hands, feet, genital organ and anus.

Karta – doer; one who performs actions with the inner attitude that ‘I am doing’.

Kirtan – singing of God’s name; practice in which a group of people sing a collection of mantras.

Kosha – sheath or body; a dimension of experience and existence. The five koshas are: annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijnanamaya kosha, and anandamaya kosha. See Linga sharira.

Krishna, Sri – literally, ‘black’ or ‘dark’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Kriya – action; cleansing practice (shatkarma); practice of kriya yoga.

Kriya yoga – practices of kundalini yoga designed to speed the evolution of humanity.

Kundalini – the evolutionary energy in a human being; spiritual energy; Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which, when awakened, awakens the chakras, resulting in progressive enlightenment.

Lila – literally, ‘play’; activity of prakriti and its three gunas.

Linga sharira – subtle or psychic body that becomes particularly active during the dream state by creating a world of its own; consists of the three sheaths: intelligence

(vijñānamaya kośha), mind (manomaya kośha) and vital energy (prāṇamaya kośha). See Kośha.

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Veda Vyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it.

Mahat – greater mind; the total mind which includes manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. See Antahkarana.

Mala – impurity; dirt; impurity of mind such as lust, greed, anger.

Mala, maala – garland; rosary used to aid mantra repetition.

Manas – finite mind, rational mind; the mind concerned with senses, thought and counter-thought; perception, intelligence; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Mandir – temple.

Manomaya kośha – mental sheath or body; mental sphere of life and awareness. See Kośha.

Mantra – words of power; sound vibrations which liberate the mind when repeated.

Maya – means by which Brahman creates the phenomenal world; power of creation; illusive power; in Vedānta philosophy, the two powers of maya are: 1. the power of veiling, and 2. the power of projection; in Sāṃkhya philosophy, another name for Prakṛiti.

Mishritam – mixed results of an action; that which works for and against one.

Moksha – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya.

Mudha – a dull and inert state of mind; perplexed.

Mukti – release, liberation, final absolution of the consciousness from the chain of birth and death and from the illusion of maya.

Naishkarmya – state of being actionless.

Narayana – epithet of Lord Viṣṇu, the god of the Hindu trinity who is the supporter of life.

Nidra – fourth instinct; deep sleep; isolation from the mind and senses; disassociation.

Nimitta – instrument; instrumental cause.

Nirlipta – the state of being unattached.

Nirvana – cessation of suffering; final liberation or emancipation in Buddhist thought.

Nishkama karma – action done without desire. This type of action purifies the mind and heart without creating new bondage.

Nishkama karma yoga – action without expectation of fruits and done without personal interest or egoism in order to come closer to the absolute reality.

Pada – foot; one of the five organs of action. See Karmendriya.

Pani – hand; one of the five organs of action. See Karmendriya.

Para – supreme dimension, the atma, soul or self. See Apra.

Paramahansa – literally, ‘beyond the swan’ (which has the legendary ability to distill reality from unreality); a sannyasin established in Brahma vidya.

Patanjali, Sage – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga, including ashtanga yoga.

Payu – anus, the organ of excretion; one of the five organs of action. See Karmendriya.

Phala – fruit, result; consequence.

Phalasha – expectation.

Pitta – bile, one of the three humours (doshas) described in ayurveda. See Dosha.

Pooja – worship.

Prahlad – the son of a demon king and a great devotee of Vishnu.

Prakriti – individual nature; nature; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; the active principle of manifest energy; counterpart of purusha in Samkhya philosophy. See Samkhya.

Pralaya – cosmic dissolution.

Pramana – right knowledge; knowledge based on, or proved by, direct sensation or cognition.

Pramoda – pleasure.

Prana – vital energy force sustaining life and creation, permeating the whole of creation and existing in both the macrocosmos and microcosmos.

Pranamaya kosha – energy sheath, or vital pranic body; the sheath covering the self which is composed of pranic vibration and the rhythm of pranic forces. See Kosha.

Pranayama – a series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana within the body.

Prarabdha karma – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; previous karmas which have matured enough to give fruit; that portion of one's actions which is bound to fructify in the present life and cannot be averted.

Pratipaksha bhavana – taking the opposite attitude; a means to balance the mind.

Purusha – literally, 'the one who lives in the city (of the body)'; the soul; pure consciousness according to Samkhya philosophy, undefiled and unlimited by contact with prakriti or matter; can also refer to a man or a human being. See Samkhya.

Purushartha – human attainment; the four basic needs or desires to be fulfilled in life, viz. artha (wealth), kama (desire), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation).

Raga – passion; affection; attachment; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as attraction or attachment to what gives pleasure.

Raja – king, chief.

Raja yoga – the supreme yoga; union through control of the mental processes and concentration of the mind; the most authoritative text is Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* which contains ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path.

Rajarishi – royal sage; philosopher king; a rishi who is kshatriya.

Rajas – one of the three gunas or attributes; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement. See Guna.

Rajoguna – quality of rajas.

Rama, Sri – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda.

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version was composed by Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in seven chapters.

Ravana – the ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Sita, Sri Rama's wife, and was slain by Sri Rama; his ten heads symbolize attachment to the phenomenal reality.

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self.

Sadhaka – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant.

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly.

Sakama karma – action motivated by desire; selfish or egotistic action.

Sakshi – that which observes the phenomenal reality without being affected at all; witness.

Samadhi – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of the mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga.

Samatvam – equipoise; balance in life.

Samkhya – one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. Attributed to Sage Kapila, Samkhya is a spiritual science based on the division of all existence into the two eternal principles of purusha and prakriti, and the twenty-three elements of creation; the philosophical basis of the yoga system.

Samsara – illusory world; the course or circuit of worldly life; unending cycle of birth and death.

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way.

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; will-power.

Sannyasin – one who has taken sannyasa initiation, surrendering everything to the guru and the spiritual journey.

Sanyam – restraint, self-discipline; harmonious control of concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and samadhi fused into one process.

Satchidananda – literally, ‘truth-consciousness-bliss’; the nature of Supreme Consciousness.

Sattwa – one of the three gunas, or attributes of nature; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium and purity. See Guna.

Seva – service; selfless service; literally, ‘being That’; to become one with the divine transcendental nature, and to express that nature in thought, word and deed.

Shankaracharya, Adi – the name of a celebrated teacher of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, he was an enlightened sage who is said to have established the Dashnami order of sannyasa and authored a large number of scriptural works.

Shankhaprakshalana – literally, ‘cleaning the conch’; a cleansing technique (shatkarma) of hatha yoga that uses saline water to clean the stomach (which is shaped like a conch) and the small and large intestines.

Sita – daughter of King Janaka and the wife of Sri Rama, as recorded in the epic *Ramayana*.

Smriti – memory; a class of texts called dharma shastra handed down by tradition.

Srimad Bhagavata – one of the eighteen major Puranas. Dealing with the avatars of Vishnu, it speaks in great detail about the life of Sri Krishna.

Srishti – creation.

Sthoola – gross, basic; relating to the waking state of consciousness.

Sthoola abhimana – the gross self-arrogating sense of doership.

Sukha – pleasure, enjoyment.

Sukshma – subtle; relating to the world of the psyche. See Linga sharira.

Sushupti – third dimension of consciousness; deep sleep or unconscious realm of mind; profound repose undisturbed by the senses.

Sutradhara – literally, ‘the holder of the string’; controller of the situation; the puppet-master; lord of the universe; one who holds to the sutras of a text.

Swabhava – one’s own essential nature.

Swabhimana – self esteem.

Swami – literally, ‘master of the mind’; master of the self; title of sannyasins.

Swapna – second dimension of consciousness; subconscious realm of mind, state of dreaming, the mind is looking inwards, seeing the internal experience, not the external objects.

Tamas – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; inertia, stability; ignorance, darkness; unwillingness to change. See Guna.

Tamoguna – quality of tamas.

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana including mantra, yantra and other esoteric practices.

Tulsidas – author of one of the versions of the famous epic *Ramayana* called the *Ramacharitamanas*, which describes the life of Sri Rama. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India.

Turiya – fourth dimension of consciousness; superconsciousness; simultaneous awareness of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind which links and transcends them; a state of liberation.

Upadhi – instrument, a superimposed thing or attribute that gives a limited view of what it veils.

Upanishads – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally one hundred and eight in number, containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and

disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, 'to sit near and listen' (to the spiritual teacher); regarded as the source of Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya philosophies.

Upastha – genital organ; one of the five organs of action. See Karmendriya.

Vairagya – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion.

Vak – organ of speech; word; speech. See Karmendriya.

Valmiki, Sage – name of a celebrated sage who meditated for so long that he became interred in a termite mound. He was author of the first *Ramayana*.

Vasana – subtle impressions which are the seeds of desires.

Vasishtha, Sage – a celebrated rishi and seer of the Vedas; guru of Sri Rama; author of many vedic hymns. His teachings are recorded in *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the greatest expositions of jnana yoga.

Vata – wind, gas; one of the three humours (doshas) described in ayurveda. See Dosha.

Vedanta – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, 'the last part of the Vedas'; the school of Hindu thought based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita).

Vedas – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from the Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of humankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5,000 BC.

Vijnanamaya kosha – astral or psychic (higher mental) sheath or body; one of the sheaths of the soul, consisting of the principle of intellect or buddhi, the subtler level of our own existence with its vision, intuition, wisdom and power of understanding; the covering of the self which is made of knowledge. See Kosha.

Vikalpa – fancy, unfounded belief, imagination; oscillation of the mind; one of the five modifications of mind listed in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

Vikara – the condition of change; modification, generally with reference to the modifications of the mind.

Vikshepa – dissipation; the tossing of the mind which obstructs concentration.

Viparyaya – reverse; mistake; distraction of mind; wrong knowledge or wrong understanding.

Vishada – unhappiness, dejection, despair.

Vishwamitra, Sage – literally, 'friend of the universe'; a celebrated sage.

Vishwanath – name of Lord Vishnu.

Viveka – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding; sense of discrimination between the self and what is not the self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha.

Vivekananda, Swami – (1863–1903); disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa; he brought his guru's teachings to the West.

Vrindavan – name of a forest near Gokula where Sri Krishna used to play as a child.

Yoga – union; the root is yuj, meaning 'to join', 'to yoke'; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy.

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali.

Yoga Vasishtha – a monumental scripture on Vedanta in the form of a dialogue between Sri Rama and his guru Sage Vasishtha.

Yogi – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice.

Yogini – a female adept of yoga; female follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice.

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